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The Works of Leonard Merrick

THE HOUSE OF LYNCH

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The Works of

LEONARD MERRICK

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WHILE PARIS LAUGHED: Being Pranks and Passions of the Poet Tricotrin.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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THE HOUSE OF LYNCH

By LEONARD MERRICK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
G. K. CHESTERTON

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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INTRODUCTION

MR. LEONARD MERRICK, in most of his books, and as some think in the best of his books, has been concerned with the comedy of Bohemia. He has delighted the world with many tales of that unworldly optimism and that equally unworldly opportunism. In *The House of Lynch,* doubtless, he strikes a graver and perhaps even a sterner note. It might be said to touch not the comedy of Bohemia but the tragedy of Bohemia. Or if the issue of the story is too triumphant to be called tragic, the treatment of it can at least be called comparatively realistic. The sincerity of the study can hardly be appreciated properly without some memory of the brilliant carnival of inconsequence associated with his better-known books. For *The House of Lynch* is, among other things, the study of the real struggle of an artist against real difficulties, which he has defied for a reason that is not fantastic, even if some would call it fanatical. He is one for whom being poor and honest is a fighting paradox and not a faded truism. No book is full of a

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finer laughter than *Conrad in Quest of His Youth;* but it is rather enriched by the irony which reminds us throughout that Conrad had a little too much money. If it could have been called "Conrad in Quest of His Life," in the sense of his livelihood, the story might possibly have been more happy if less humorous. I am, myself, especially attracted by the adventures of the impecunious poet in *While Paris Laughed;* but Mr. Merrick is too much of an artist to treat in the same way the pugnacious poverty in *The House of Lynch.* He does not confuse a peasant's toil to get a living with a vagabond's trick to get a lodging. The same simile of a peasant might serve to remind us of the other side of France from that so gracefully sketched in the Montmartre quarter; and the same idle fancy of a shifting of titles might easily imagine Mr. Merrick writing a more realistic romance about the later and darker days of the same great capital, when it defiantly waited its deliverance from the menace of the worst tyranny of the world; a story that might well have been called "While Paris Watched" or even "While Paris Prayed."

For *The House of Lynch* also deals with tyranny and deliverance from tyranny; and though that tyranny sprang up in a more sordid

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environment, it has spread itself with something of the same cosmopolitan power. *The House of Lynch* is the story of a spirited and self-respecting artist, who refused to profit by the polluted wealth of a base and blatant American millionaire. He insists on marrying the daughter of the millionaire as if she were the daughter of a pauper; and the rest of the story records his own struggle to avoid pauperism and maintain principle. It is here that the graver and more realistic method of Mr. Merrick is appropriately developed. He does not fail to state the real problems that often change and chill the fiery simplicity of such a challenge; especially that double altruism and division of duties which appears in the presence of the child; and which may have something to do with the tradition which encouraged enthusiasts to be celibates. He never glosses over the fact that such a challenge is desperately hard to maintain; but he never leaves on the reader's mind the least doubt of his conviction that it is worth maintaining. The perilous but quite positive poise or balance is very dexterously suggested in the temporary surrender of one of the partners in the adventure, who repents of her virtue and then repents of her evil repentance. There is never any reason to lose sight of the original

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root of the trouble, the modern tyranny of gold and especially of ill-gotten gold. It would be unreasonable to expect even an American millionaire to have a thousand sons-in-law; but he may well have a thousand dependents; and the modern moral problem undoubtedly is that of turning all those dependents into independents. For such fortunes are in reality exactly what they are here in romance; shameful drugs poisoning private honour, and permanent pestilences threatening public health. Excuses are made for them in politics and the press, the same excuses which the stunted and half-witted soul of the little plutocrat makes for them in this story. But the very excuses offered are enough to prove the whole situation to be inexcusable. They have a flat and fourth-rate character which has hardly ever before belonged to the ruling minds of a human society. Ours is perhaps the first generation of men which has allowed itself to be ruled, not merely by men who might have undignified characters, but by men who must have undignified aims. The mere millionaire has already proved his inferior intelligence by seeking what he pretends to have proved his superior intelligence by finding. Military courage or tribal loyalty may be rudimentary and barbaric virtues, but they were

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virtues; it has been left for our own time to allow men to rise to national and international power wholly and solely by their vices, and these only the meaner vices. Hence it follows that a plutocracy, unlike an aristocracy, has not any sad or even sulky legend surrounding its decay and death; for all men feel in their hearts that its death would not be in the least sad. The fall of the House of Lynch would be surrounded by no such tragic portents as the fall of the House of Usher; for we should all feel that it would not be a tragic, but rather an agreeably comic incident. It would only be a business going "bust"; and as bad a business as there has ever been in this world.

It may be counted very fitting, therefore, that Mr. Leonard Merrick, who has himself always maintained the difficult and disinterested fight for the fine art of writing, among the vulgar and vapid distractions of a commercial civilisation, should have devoted one at least of his novels to a serious sketch of a personal struggle against the commercial power. Those who delight most in the dance of fanciful events in his lighter novels will least regret it, if the spirit of this one is a shade more grave or even more grim. It is always the charge against any entertaining treatment of the ups and downs of the Micawber

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mode of existence, that it deals less with the downs than with the ups. It is well to have a story in which the downs are taken with dignity and even defiance; and which can thus be said to be realistic but not pessimistic. By comparison such passages may be sober or even sombre, but they are in no sense sceptical; they do not work to weaken the nerve of will which they analyse. They will suggest another side of a literary individuality to which we are grateful for many other causes; and permit us to pay some tribute of personal respect, where we already owe so much of a more impersonal pleasure.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

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THE HOUSE OF LYNCH

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THE HOUSE OF LYNCH

CHAPTER I

THOUGH he had resolved to avoid her, he was there after all—they were sitting in the conservatory.

"Well, what do you think of a New York dinner dance, Mr. Keith?" she said. She bore a name that stank in the nostrils of the world; her father was the devastating Trust magnate, the debaucher of politics, the infamous multi-millionaire—Jordan B. Lynch.

"Mrs. Waldehast is giving me a novel experience—one more."

"Is it so different from what you call 'small-and-earlies' in England?"

"I haven't been to many; I'm not a Society personage, Miss Lynch."

"Artists don't think much of Society do they?"

"Some think of it more than they do of art. I don't mean your artists here, of course—I don't

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know enough about them—I mean our swells at home."

"I've never grasped the distinction between your 'swells' and our 'smart set'—I'm not sure if I know what a swell is."

"Well, I'm probably the only person you know who isn't one."

"Mr. Keith," exclaimed the girl, "why will you always address me as if we were residing in different planets?"

"Merely because we are. Mrs. Waldehast has been wonderfully nice to me; but this is the only smart house I have been to in New York, and I should never have met you at any mutual friend's in London." He hesitated, and then, as she gave no sign of understanding him, went on, "It's quite as caddish to harp on one's pecuniary drawbacks as on one's pecuniary advantages, but you may have gathered by this time that—er—that I —that——"

"I have 'gathered,' " she smiled.

"Thank you," said Keith; "I might have known your intelligence couldn't fail."

"Well?"

"That's all. Excepting that I'm afraid I have *not* always addressed you quite as you say. You see you come here a great deal, and so do I, and I've almost forgotten things in moments."

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"Well, forget them now, please. Do you know I think you're horrid—I ask you to talk, and you just speak!"

"You're very kind. What do you ask me to talk about?"

"Well, what did you talk about to your friends?"

He laughed. "Oh, on the planet that I mustn't remember, we talk about our difficulties, when we aren't romancing about our prices. To you, Miss Lynch, we should talk Greek. The dominant adjective is 'hard up.'"

"But you have some good times?"

"Oh yes. At our swaggerest functions—those given by fellows who have more than one room—men even bring their wives. And the wives bring the babies, and put them to sleep on the host's bed. They don't keep a nurse, and they couldn't leave the babies behind alone. Some of the Greek?"

She denied it radiantly: "No, that is rather humorous."

"Y-e-s; I'm told the humour soon wears thin."

"Well, I'm very glad that Dardy saw that picture of yours when she was in London—she's enthusiastic about your portrait of her! So am I; it's splendid. You know, she wondered whether

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you'd come over when Mr. Waldehast wrote—she didn't know but what it was a lot to ask."

"It's a very usual thing to ask. And it isn't always as complimentary as we want to think; a woman often sees a half-length somewhere, and sends the man a commission, because she appreciated—his model. Lots of our men come over to paint people they have never seen. It's rather a nervous journey."

"Why, yes, I suppose so—the people may be perfectly hideous. You must have been glad to see Dardy?"

"I was. The best thing to be said of portrait painting, as a rule, is that it's the only education anybody is paid to take—it teaches you to search for individuality. A portrait isn't made by painting features—you have to paint the character behind them."

"Not everyone would say 'thank you' for that," she remarked.

"Quite so—and not everyone would be satisfied with my portrait of him. But it doesn't matter, because I don't want to paint portraits. It's awful work! A portrait painter, nine times out of ten, has to choose between being an artist and a courtier."

"I think you'd be very unwise to talk like that,"

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she said sharply; "it's bad business! I've told you so before."

"Yes, I know." He flushed. "I suppose I'm not a business man. It was stupid of me to say it."

"No, you're not to think that; you'll take that back, please. It's how I want you to talk, to *me* —as you really feel! But I do caution you against talking like it to other people. You ought to make a lot of money in New York if you're smart."

"Oh, I shouldn't have declined any commissions just now—in fact, I've stayed on here in the hope of getting some."

"You did decline one," she said; "I asked you to paint *me,* and you made excuses. Was that the reason—you thought *I'd* want you to be a courtier?"

"I think I begged you to let me paint you, didn't I? I was very eager to."

"You offered to make a sketch of me as a gift —that wasn't what I wanted. Anyhow, whether you hate portraits or not, you ought to pretend to gush about them. Dardy's picture should do you good here if you take the right tone. You know, Mr. Keith, I'm ages older than you."

"Yes. I'm thirty-three; I suppose you're twenty."

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"It's sweet of you, but I'm more. And I didn't mean in years, I meant in—— Well, you know what I meant. Do you think I'm horribly worldly, Mr. Keith?"

"Am I meant to tell you the truth?"

"Sure! I can suffer."

"Then you've amazed me, in moments, by your unworldliness. That was what interested me—you were so unlike what I thought you would be."

"What was that?"

"I thought what a fraud it was that you had such a—such a—I'm bound to be blatant—such a beautiful face, for I didn't for an instant suppose that you would have a beautiful mind."

"You *are* different from the others," she murmured. "And don't you think it a fraud any more?"

"No."

"Do go ahead!"

"I only think it a pity that your life doesn't give a chance to your soul."

Her eyes were attentive, puzzled. "Religion?" she hazarded.

"The religion of 'one who loves his fellowmen.' I think that everybody ought to do all he can for humanity. Of course the influence of most of us doesn't show outside our homes, but wealth is

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a wide power, and art is a wide power—the painter speaks in every language—I don't think one is entitled to fritter away either one's wealth or one's art." His voice gained courage. "You just lectured me for saying I didn't want to go on with portraits; I don't want to go on with them, because I hope and pray that it's in me to paint something that will say more."

"You told me the other day you were 'delighted' when you got Mr. Waldehast's letter?"

"I was delighted because the commission was a valuable one. And I've done my best to deserve it; I put in as much work as Mrs. Waldehast would allow—and a good deal more than would have been discreet if she weren't a very patient woman, or at least a very amiable one. But a portrait's interest is generally limited to the domestic circle and to other artists. Technique alone never made a great work of art. The goal of art is the soul of the world—the highest art illumines a more inspiring truth than the character of Mr. So-and-so."

"What kind of pictures do you do?"

"I like the symbolic school best, but any subject that uplifts is a great one."

"Supposing they don't pay so well as Mr. So-and-so? That's possible, isn't it?"

"It's much more than possible; but my chief

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aim isn't to make money. The point is, that whatever advantages anyone may have ought to be directed to the noblest ends. It doesn't matter what one's medium is—whether one is a painter, or a priest, or a statesman, or a private citizen—one ought to put forth one's best for the benefit of one's country. That's one's duty to one's country. It's possible also that I may prove to have nothing but the ideal, that the force mayn't be there. I daresay I sounded vain—you wouldn't think me vain if you knew how frightfully I distrust myself; I often think that anybody on earth could paint as well as I do if he took as much pains. I've no facility; other men can knock things off in a day that take me a week. I may fail—and I shall be wretched, because I know that, with me, it's art first and patriotism afterwards; but I shall have been a good Englishman for all that. And I'd rather fail by being true to my conscience than make a popular success by being false. Am I a bore?"

"No, but I haven't climbed up there yet."

"I'm grateful you didn't pretend that you had. It's where most people either lie or laugh."

She frowned. "Do you confide in most people?"

"I never confided in any other woman in my life—and in very few men."

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"Oh," her glance approved; "I'll get there in time! You shall talk to me about it again."

"I'm afraid I shan't have the chance; I was going to tell you—I'm going back sooner than I intended."

"Why?" It was uttered a second late, but the tone was faultless.

"I think it would be as well."

"Surely New York is the place for you to be in just now?"

"I think on the whole it would be as well to go back," he said.

"I'm sorry you have to go."

"Thank you," said Keith in his throat. "*I'm* very sorry, but I must. I shall often think of my trip to America."

After the least pause, she said reproachfully, "I hope the prospect is a very brilliant one? Of course if your business is so urgent, you can't be expected to neglect it for the sake of your friends."

"I'm not leaving for business reasons," he acknowledged.

"Is there someone in England who's so sweet that you can't bear to be away from her?"

"I think that you know there isn't."

Her head was bent; she tapped time with her fan to the waltz of "Sammy" in the ballroom.

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"If you aren't running after a girl, I guess you must be running away from one? . . . Isn't that weak?"

"No—necessary. It's quite impossible that I could ever marry that girl, and I've got to reconcile myself to the fact; I should never reconcile myself to it while I went on seeing her. I can't afford to feel as I've been feeling lately—I've got my work to think about. So the sooner I go the better. I'm not sacrificing any chance by going—don't imagine that!—no frenzied admirers of my work will miss me."

"Perhaps the girl will miss you, though," suggested Miss Lynch.

"I haven't the conceit to think so; I don't want to think so."

The pearls and lilies on her breast rose faster. "If I were you I would!"

"It's out of the question for me to propose to her, or to say that I care for her," he insisted thickly.

"If she likes you, she won't think it out of the question. . . . Aren't you going to tell me who it is you're running away from?"

He didn't speak. His mouth was set hard.

"Is it me?" she whispered.

"Yes."

She raised her head and looked at him. There

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was nearly a line of "Sammy" before her voice came:

"Mr. Keith, I have been called the 'proudest girl in New York,' but I'm going to say an immodest thing right here." The lips trembled, and he saw the throbbing of her throat. "I want you to ask me to be your wife."

He grabbed both her hands and bowed his face on them. "I can't!" he said.

"You've got to." She smiled victoriously. "Betty Lynch doesn't let her millions spoil her happiness."

"You don't understand. I can't, it's impossible!"

"You're not—married?"

"Married? No! But I couldn't give you a home that you'd live in."

"And I don't let your foolishness spoil my happiness either—that's just why I said what I did. We need not be anxious about the home."

"I couldn't stand that, I wouldn't do it!"

"I fear I have proposed to you," she murmured, dimpling. "It would be too bad if I were refused."

"Oh, my dear," said Keith desperately, "I honour and adore you for what you said. I'd give twenty years of my life to marry you. But

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I can't. To begin with, your father would, of course, forbid the engagement."

"My father would never forbid me anything."

"Then he would give you a million or so, and I should be asked to share it. And I couldn't."

She drew her hands free. "Do you mean," she said coldly, "that you would rather give me up than swallow your pride? *I* swallowed some for *you* just now."

"It isn't a question of 'pride'; I'd put pride in the gutter for you."

"What else is it? It isn't love. I don't admire it. It's talking like a man in a book."

"Don't!" stammered Keith. "If you knew what I'm feeling!"

"I think I do know—you feel more esteem for yourself than for me. No man who was really fond of a girl would consent to lose her because she had more money than *he* had. Not if she were as rich as I, and he were as poor as a tramp! No, human nature doesn't do those things. If he were without a meal, if he hadn't a cent in his pocket or shoes to his feet, and she said what *I* have said to *you,* he would try his best to marry her if he loved her. It would be his duty, and her due."

"And so would I," gasped Keith, "if that were all!"

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"If it were 'all'?" Her startled eyes widened at him pitiably, she turned dead-white. "Oh! you mean you . . . don't approve of my father's methods? You mean you would think it . . . a disgrace?"

"For Heaven's sake! I couldn't live on his money, leave it at that! I can't talk about it. But I love you, I love you, Betty."

"Love? You have thrown my father's reputation in my face, you have told me I am too dishonest for you."

"You? You? Oh, my darling—the money, not you!"

"It is the money that keeps me," she said painfully. "Oh, I know what they say about the Trust!—I read. I hear of the people ruined, and the broken homes, and—and it doesn't make me feel good when I think about it. But I spend such a lot. It is the money that buys my frocks, and candy, and flowers; it is the money that pays for the food I eat and the house I live in. If you care for me as you wish me to believe, and yet would rather lose me than let my father make us happy, then you are telling me the money is so shameful that I am a thief to take it."

"I tell you I adore you. I want you as I never wanted anything else on earth. I don't reproach you, I don't, I don't! You were brought

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up to take it, and—and, besides what else could you have done? But *I'm* different—I'm used to roughing it, and I've got my work—and if I were weak enough to profit by a tyranny that has horrified and revolted me ever since I understood what it meant, I should be a cur, and our 'happiness' would be no happiness, it would be hell."

Miss Lynch rose haughtily. "I had thought that to say to any man what *I* have said must be as great a humiliation as a girl could know; my affront to myself is bearable compared with the indignities I have suffered from *you.*"

"Betty," he cried, "my whole income in a lucky year hasn't been half of what you spent on the candy and flowers; but I'm getting on, I'll do better for you one day if you'll only be patient, and I love you, I love you, you might wipe your boots on my heart! You may think me a madman for asking, but I'd worship you—will you marry me on what I've got?"

"Mr. Keith, you will please take me back to the room," she said.

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CHAPTER II

In his palace in Fifth Avenue, in his splendid study lined with books, none of which he had ever read, an old man sat awaiting Betty's return from the dance. This was Jordan B. Lynch. He had struggled as "Bill Lynch." Towards middle age he had adopted the "Jordan" and curtailed the "Bill."

He bent smoking moodily over the fire. It was nearly midnight, and a desk in the room was heaped with the letters that had come to his private address during the day. There were desperate letters from men whom the Trust and its radiating forces had broken; frantic entreaties from destitute women and girls whose husbands, or fathers, or brothers his operations had decoyed to disgrace or death; indictments from philanthropists, warnings from clergymen, who threatened his rapacity with Heaven's wrath. Lynch, however, had not opened any of the letters, nor would any of them be laid before him.

At the beginnning such things had disturbed him. Later they had angered him. It was the

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law of nature for the weak to suffer; why abuse him for it? he demanded. Finally, they had come to minister to his pride. These daily budgets of appeals for mercy, these admonitions overflowing the waste-baskets were an emblem of his conquest; they testified to the triumph of his career, more than his magnificent library that had no literary interest for him, and his famous pictures that he never looked at. As a burden on indigent parents in the Black Country, he had been a wage-earner as a child; as an emigrant he had been tortured by the sight of small chances that he was too poor to seize. He had hoarded, scraped, stinted his stomach for years—and been robbed of his first five hundred dollars. He had rinsed glasses behind a bar on a Mississippi steamer, had wrung a bare living from the earth in California; had planned, climbed, fallen; set his teeth and sweated; climbed again; prospected, speculated, taken, with undaunted eyes, the risk of being dashed to the bottom once more. And, by the grace of grit, he was Jordan B. Lynch, who had the world by its throat—and the world might squeak!

Poverty prolonged—grim, gaunt, grinding poverty—brutalises. Of all the cant acclaimed, none is rottener than the pretence that poverty ennobles character.

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But to-night, as he bent smoking over the fire, the weazen old man was not thinking of his conquest, he was thinking of his children.

He had been fifty when he married, already a menace to two continents; and when a son came, the piratical financier who hewed his road through the misfortunes of a multitude had taken an innocent delight in providing for his boy a plenitude of the pleasures that he himself had missed. It was the father's caprice, not the mother's, that converted a spacious nursery into a range of mountains, on which bears, formidable in real bearskin, roamed as large as life after one turned keys in them. Jordan B. Lynch's little heir, with a pop-gun, was entertained for an hour by trying to hit them before their clockwork ran down. Of course there were other nurseries. One of them contained a domesticated diving-bell, descending to an aquarium, where, on a floor of sea-shells and coral reefs, a mermaid sang, with a gramophone inside her.

The child had been bored very young, but to the man the view of such follies had yielded a permanent satisfaction—his own bitter childhood, which he had always remembered with resentment, ceased to chafe him like a bad debt. The advent of a daughter had been a disappointment, for he had wanted another son; but after the

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death of his wife it was Betty who became the dearer child. At first she charmed him more because she resembled her mother; it gratified him that his girl looked of gentle birth. Howard's features were rough-cast, like his own. Later she was his favourite because she showed him the more affection. To his daughter his profusion was ever more ebullient than to his son.

Yet he never said "no" to the boy. His children must have everything—the luxury, the education, the fun that had been withheld from him! Even because his own youth had been so sordid, he found a covert fascination in their extravagance. When he saw the bills, he smiled wryly, recalling the ferocity of life to himself at their age. The secretaries who corrected his English had been much diverted to see the financial leader engrossed by the lad's first dress suit; Lynch was reflecting that the first dress suit that he himself had put on had been ordered when he was forty.

In his commercial aspect, corrupt and ruthless, he was a tender father; and a genius in finance, he lacked foresight in his home. He had lived to deplore his indulgence of Howard, with the quintessence of remorse which many, who are untroubled by a sin, may suffer for a stupidity. The drollery of having a man of fashion for a son

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had long ceased to tickle the old adventurer. The denseness of Lynch junior to the financial alphabet was a prank of nature's—neither of them was to be blamed for that, continuously galling as the senior found it; the uppishness might pass; the blank deficiency of purpose might have permitted optimism in a parent. But Lynch had docketed his son "worthless" when he realised that the young man dissipated without zest; a profligacy of vehemence would have left hope of reform, a profligacy of lassitude left none.

He had made no illusions for himself—the crowd who justly reviled him would have been glad to read his thoughts—his only son was a failure! But there had remained Betty—Betty, whose Fifth Avenue tone was the only music he appreciated—his girl, who wore her frocks like a real aristocrat! The surviving ambitions of his fatherhood were absorbed by her. He had hoped to see her bearing a great name, had dreamed of it. He would give her to no illustrious pauper who meant to scatter her millions and neglect her; she should choose a noble who was rich already, one who would love her honestly, and whom she'd love. He had imagined the ancestral home, the crest on her carriage, a score of childish details that were sweet to picture because they

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meant the exaltation of Betty. And now Betty had as good as told him she was fond of some artist!

The street bell sounded, and Lynch opened the study door, in the thought that the girl had returned; but it was Howard who had rung, having forgotten his latchkey.

"Hello," he said languidly, seeing Lynch still up, "you're late!"

"Hello," said Lynch, "you're early!"

It was the first time they had met that day.

"I know; why haven't you gone to bed?"

"I'm waiting for Betty."

"Where's she gone?"

"The Waldehasts'. She expected you to take her."

"Me? I never said I'd go, did I?" He lounged into the room, and lit a cigarette. Though he took infinite pains in dressing himself, he did no credit to his tailor; and the fashion which ordained that his sandy hair should be parted in the centre and plastered behind his projecting ears was not becoming to him. "What's the news?"

"W-e-ll, there is the news of your 'pastoral dinner' last night," snarled Lynch.

"Oh?" He put his hands in his trouser-

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pockets and smiled impudently over his father's head.

"I see that the restaurant was 'converted into a meadow.' "

"The likeness wasn't very faithful, but that was the notion," drawled the young man.

"*The Herald* says 'a rivulet of champagne sparkled between banks of orchids.' "

"I hope *The Day* was just as picturesque. I never read it, but I have a filial interest in its circulation."

"You're very humorous," said Lynch, "very Harvardy and brilliant! Is it indispensable at dinner in your set for the ladies to 'pick diamonds from a strawberry bed, as souvenirs'?"

"No. That was an innovation of my own."

"It was a great scheme."

"So *I* thought. They did scramble! I saw all the frenzy of a bargain-sale without being damaged by the crush."

"You might have done so if you had been earning ten dollars a week behind a counter!" said his father acridly.

"Ah," Howard looked disconcerted; "your repartee—if I may mention it, sir—is vulgar."

He mixed a generous highball and there was a long silence. Lynch blinked at the fire, mourning mistakes.

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Warmed by the whisky, Howard grew facetious. "Brace up!" he murmured. "I haven't broken you."

"You have not broken me—financially."

"What? . . . Oh, parentally! Don't be sentimental, governor; it doesn't suit you. Take it easy. If you knew how deadly dull life is, you wouldn't call me down for trying to get a gleam of fun. Anyhow, I see you gave half a million to the Nixonville Institute this week; if you can afford Institutes, you can spare me a dinner."

"My charities do good—to me; they are policy."

"Well, it does you good that I make a few debts. If *I* spend it while *you* scoop it in, people won't have so much to howl about. That's policy too! You don't do my brains justice, you know. *My* schemes are subtle; you want to think 'em out. You ought to charge the dinner to your charity account!" He giggled. "I take Roosevelt's point of view; he doesn't approve of fortunes 'swollen beyond healthy limits.' Nor do I—I'm doing my best to cope with a national evil."

He emptied his glass, and sauntered towards the door with a nod. "Good-night."

"Good-night," grunted Lynch. He hesitated.

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"Say, Howard! D'ye know anything of that fellow Keith?"

"Keith?"

"That artist that Betty asked to the house? He was unable to come, but I have heard her speak about him."

"Oh! No; I've only seen him once. *I* don't meet him—he's nothing, he's an artist, he's staying in a boarding-house."

"Is that so?"

"He mentioned it himself at the Waldehasts'; didn't seem ashamed of it, either—doesn't 'know,' I suppose. Why?"

"Well, Betty is interested in him. I wondered why she had asked him home, and I taxed her with it."

"What? Do you mean she—— Oh, rats! She may have flirted with him—he's all right to look at, except for his clothes; she wouldn't understand about them."

"Well—I guess you're right," said Lynch, seeing that there was nothing to be learnt. "Good-night."

It was a long while before Betty came in. As she crossed the room she was almost as pale as she had been when Keith's meaning broke upon her; the look in her eyes puzzled the old man. But his tone was innocent.

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"Well? Had a good time, poppet?"

"I'm very tired, father," she said in a strained voice. "I'm going straight upstairs."

"I have been saving my last cigar to smoke with you. Can't you spare me five minutes?"

She stood by the mantelpiece, a hand clenched on the marble: "I have nothing to say to-night."

"Howard claims that he never promised to take you—he came in a while ago."

"Oh?"

"Anybody there? Your friend was there, I guess?"

She nodded, with her mouth squeezed.

He got up, and touched her.

"He was there, and we talked, and I asked him to marry me!" said the girl in an outburst. And she slid crookedly into a chair and sobbed as if she would break a blood-vessel, with her face laid on the arm.

Lynch himself was scarcely less moved. Her words dismissed his last hope. The highest expectation of his life had collapsed.

"W-e-ll," he said, "I guess the Queen may do these things. Don't break up like that, poppet; you've nothing to blush for—*he* couldn't ask *you,* that's certain. I ain't going to raise Cain, you know; if you want to marry him, you've just got to marry him, there's no doubt about it. So dry

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your eyes, and sit round, and I'll light that cigar —see?"

"I am not going to marry him," she answered, raising herself.

The old man stared at her speechlessly. "What?" he said at last.

"He—he made conditions."

"How's that? he 'made conditions'? You offered to marry him, and he 'made conditions'?"

"He said I must marry him on what he had got; that he wouldn't take anything from you, not a cent!"

"Is that all?" said Lynch, on a laugh. "Don't you fret your eyes red about that!"

"It's real, he means it. He thinks our money's tainted, he said it 'revolted' him, he said he would rather lose me than touch it. Oh, I am ashamed! He degraded me! I sat there feeling like a thief. You don't know what it was! I loved him, and I couldn't look him in the face—I couldn't defend my own father. Oh, if I could have changed places with any decent girl in New York, I might have been so happy to-night!"

"Honey!" he pleaded, trembling over her. "My honey, baby—don't!"

"Is it so bad as they say? Tell me. I've been a coward, I haven't talked, but I'm not blind—

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you must know I know. I've got to understand now, I've got to know just what I am!"

"You're one of the wealthiest girls in the world," he faltered. "Is that good enough?"

"No! There's not a girl clerking in this city who has been degraded as your daughter was to-night. I've got to know just what I am, I've got to know if he was justified."

"Betty," said Lynch, "it is mainly for you I am working—I am not piling up millions for Howard to squander them when I go. You know I have aimed at seeing you an English duchess—I have sometimes even—er—knuckled under, in view of my ambitions for you. Don't ask me if I have justified a man in insulting you."

"I don't want the millions if they bring me contempt—I'm a woman, and I loved him, and I want the right to tell him that he lied!"

"Well, of course, of course he lied," said Lynch soothingly. "He doesn't know; you say he is an artist—what knowledge has he of finance? I guess he has read a leader in *The Flag* and been stuffed; why doesn't he read *The Day?* See here, there's not a business going, however small it may be, that hasn't got its smaller enemies: the greenhorn that has opened a little dry-goods store in a village is cursed by the pedlar, who don't need to come around there any more; the pedlar says

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the greenhorn is a 'monopolist, crushing competition.' Even the pedlar is attacked—there is another pedlar in the same district, who growls that the first fellow's pack is too big. Through all commercial and industrial enterprise, poppet, it is the same thing; but the larger the pack, the louder the growl."

"It sounds all right," she admitted weakly; "but then, I want to believe it!"

"You've just got to believe it. Don't you go looking for trouble. In this life it's every man for himself, and the only man who pretends different is the one who's so weak-kneed that he wants somebody else to shove him along. The 'wicked monopolist' don't monopolise selfishness. See those letters on the desk? I haven't touched them—I don't hire secretaries in order to pass my day reading what don't concern me—but there are two things I can tell you about them right here. They're all begging letters from strangers, who recognise that if I gave to all the beggars who write me, I'd be selling bananas on the street; and every stranger has marked his letter 'private,' to get an advantage over the other stranger."

"Some of them may be deserving, for all that," she said.

"Have I time to sort them? Can I neglect

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business while I convert myself into an investigation bureau? I do all the good I can, without being unjust to myself and my children. I made a gift of half a million to the Nixonville Institute only this week. My charities are very numerous, and they are my joy as well as my duty. Had your Mr. Keith any comments to make on my charities?"

She stirred in the chair restlessly: "No."

"You're going to tell me just what he said; I don't allow you to be insulted."

"He said—well, it was I who said it first: I saw what he meant when he said that he couldn't marry me. But he acknowledged that was his reason. He said he wouldn't talk about it. He said he thought the Trust revolting, that if he lived on money from—from a source he condemned, he would be a 'cur.' He wanted me to marry him on what he has."

"What's that?"

She gave a shrug. "Not much."

"Is that all he said?"

"I think that's all."

"Well, forget about him! Have a good time. I'll send you to Europe with Howard—the London season'll be starting soon—I'll come over myself and fix up that presentation at Court for you. There's nothing smashed. In a year you'll

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wonder what you saw in him and why you were so wretched."

"I have never imagined I cared seriously for anyone before," she said. "It's very easy to be cynical about other people's sorrows."

"As you go through life, poppet, you'll get experience of a bitterer cynic than me, or any other man. That's Time! W-e-ll, you know I wasn't set on your marrying him, and I am a long way from it to-night, but if you've made your mind up, go ahead! Don't worry yourself over trifles; it would not be a difficult transaction to persuade a man to take an income for nothing, plus the girl he loves."

"I wouldn't marry him now if he went on his knees to me!" she said vehemently. "Besides, he meant it, I tell you, he meant every word."

"I have met cranks already, but I have never met one yet who wasn't amenable to reason through his pocket."

"You don't know him!" There was a little unconscious pride in her voice.

"No, but I know human nature. . . . See here, when I made your mother's acquaintance, she hadn't a notion who I was—I had gone South incog. The rumpus had begun even then; there was some of the poppycock talked in those days that there is now. Her father had very high prin-

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ciples, and nothing else—he had been crippled by the War; the twenty thousand that he left to you was all locked up in sugar at that time. He spoke to me about the 'millionaire Lynch and his methods' as he might have spoken about the devil and all his works. But your mother was very sweet; I liked her. So one day I said to him, *'I'm* Lynch—and I want to marry your daughter.' W-e-ll, he adopted another view of my methods! . . . If you ask me to do so, I will smoke a cigar with Mr. Keith, and he will see that his judgment was erroneous."

"If I 'ask you to do so'?" she said. "If you were to send for him, I could never lift my head again! I'll never speak another word to him as long as I live—it doesn't matter whether I forget or not." She got up, and righted her hair with a pretence of composure before a mirror. "Don't you think we've stayed here late enough talking about Mr. Keith?"

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CHAPTER III

AFTER he left the dance, Richard Keith walked miles blindly. A few hours earlier he had meant to leave her, had been almost resigned to leaving her, but in the interval the unforeseen had happened; she had said she cared for him, and he had insulted her—and she was much dearer to him than she had been a few hours earlier. Before the dance he had thought that there could be nothing more impossible than for him to ask Miss Lynch to marry him. But he had asked her; and now, in spite of her repulse and his distress of mind—in spite of common sense itself—the hope persisted.

He tried to view the marriage with her eyes, and shrank aghast from the magnitude of her sacrifice. Yet he prayed that she would make it. He wanted it not only for his sake; because he loved her he wanted it for hers. "I know about the people ruined, and the broken homes!" The words had been hideous on her lips. Yes, she knew! Not the whole, not a tithe, she did not see the suicides' blood or their daughters'

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helplessness—the victims' cries did not pierce the music in the mansions; from her carriage window she could not read the histories of Magdalens in the street. But vaguely she knew—and he hungered for her to be worthier, he yearned for her to be as noble as she looked.

Alternately he wondered if he was insane to dream of her consenting, and if he would be justified in pleading to her. Could she be happy as his wife? Her sacrifice would not abate the suffering—if her shame satisfied her, perhaps his appeal would be grossly selfish? But he could not think it would be selfish after what she had owned. Though in her presence he felt a pauper, he was indeed a rising man—she would not starve in his arms. The last two years had brought recognition and a banking account. A balance of a few hundred pounds and Mr. Waldehast's cheque for fifteen hundred dollars represented a stately monument on the road of his life.

His father had been a clergyman because the Church had called to him, not because there was a living in the family; indeed, expedience had pointed in another direction. A painfully inadequate stipend had been eked out by a slender private income. The widow had invested the principal in a bubble company, and found herself penniless while the boy was at a student hotel

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in Montparnasse. He had been wrenched from Montparnasse to enter an office in East India Avenue, where her brother-in-law generously paid him more than his services were worth, and ungenerously reminded him of it. From the time Keith was nineteen until his mother died he had been breadwinner for them both, and simulated cheerfulness. If the clerk wept for the art student, he wore no mourning for him, nor did he doubt that he would reach his mistress at the end. The journey would be longer and rougher, that was all! The widow heard no murmurs. He was an automaton by day and an enthusiast by night; the cipher in the city office laboured like a hero in the Clapham lodgings. And of course the lady thought it a pity: "He would get a much better position with his uncle if he only took more interest in the business—she was speaking for his own good!"

But the inner voice was stronger. He had drawn before he could spell, drawn on his slate, on the walls of his nursery—and been punished for it—drawn on the backs of his father's sermons—drawn, as many children lie, because it was an imperative and unreasoning instinct. It had been instinct that riveted him before the Turner water-colours one day when "art" was an unknown name, when he knew only that each

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separate piece of paper seemed to have caught all the light and loveliness of the world. His mother had run into the National Gallery with him, during a visit to London, for shelter from the rain, and the child understood that she thought him a little noodle when she saw his eyes. The clerk understood that she thought him a fool when she saw him paint. To the average mind there is nothing sillier than genius before it is renowned. Afterwards, the renown is admired.

At her death the office had been abandoned that he might have more time to study. His abject poverty had not been sufficiently prolonged to dull his ideals, but he had often been dinnerless and even homeless, and for years the income from his art had not equalled the salary from his clerkship. To-day, if he had not been in love with the daughter of a millionaire, he would have been elated by his pecuniary position; four to five hundred a year was conspicuous, for his age. Besides, he hoped that his prices would improve much more. Although the man was too truly an artist to seek popular success at the cost of doing inferior work, he was too truly an artist to be indifferent to wealth. Wealth is the master-key to beauty—to travel in beautiful places, to the collection of beautiful things.

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Keith desired riches ardently, though he put his conscience first.

No, wild it might be to aspire to marry her, but not selfish, he thought, for she cared for him. Since it was for him she cared, he naturally overestimated the importance of her caring. Lightly as a man thinks of a girl's tenderness for any other man, he is apt to think it an imperishable influence in her life if her tenderness is for himself. Brown and Jones are always secretly amused at Robinson's fear that Miss Green will break her heart if he has to give her up: "Dear old chap, Robinson, one of the best, but his idea that he is an object of profound devotion is rather comic." But Brown and Jones similarly exaggerate the feelings that they have inspired in the Misses Pink and White. It is not vanity, it is faith; the desirable lover accepts the girl's own view of her emotions—and the girl who doesn't imagine her love to be lifelong is not worth marrying.

It was daybreak when Richard Keith re-entered the boarding-house to which he had fled dismayed after a few weeks' experience of hotel terms; and a letter from him was brought to Betty when she woke—a long, remorseful, futile letter. It said everything but what she wanted to hear—that he withdrew his objection.

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To most people it is fatally easy to feel convinced of what they wish to believe. Lynch's daughter wished to believe that her wealth was honest. Though Keith was by no means essential to her happiness, she fancied that he was, and a sentimental illusion may create quite as much ferment as an heroic love; she was suffering violently, and it would have been horrible to her to think that this hurricane of hopelessness sprang from her attachment to an infamous fortune. It was far nicer to believe that her father was traduced by the world and that Keith was wantonly unreasonable.

She pitied herself passionately. Never in her frivolous life before had she wanted anything so much, and never until now had anything been denied to her. Because it was denied, she wanted it more vehemently still.

She sent no answer to his letter. The impulse to assuage her pain by mortifying him with a few hurtful lines was very strong, but she felt that silence became her better; and the thought that, on the whole, it would mortify him even more, enabled her to resist the temptation.

Nor did she go to the Waldehasts' during the next few days, ardently as she desired to hear about him; so Keith contrived to see her only when she was driving—when he could not be cer-

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tain whether he was ignored, or only overlooked. However, she wrote asking Mrs. Waldehast to go to her. They had been friends since their schooldays, and Dardy Waldehast rustled in upon her promptly.

"Now, I'm just dying with curiosity," she said, "so you've got to tell me everything!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Betty.

"I've been trying to pump Keith, but I can't get anything out of him."

"Mr. Keith?" Her tone implied that the reference to him was irrelevant. "Oh, he hasn't sailed then? I thought he was leaving New York?"

"He is very much in New York at present—he has been living in my rocker, waiting for you to come in."

"Did he say so?"

"Not in words. What's the trouble with him, Betty? I thought you meant it?"

"So I did mean it; you know very well I meant it! Dardy, I'm miserable; he has treated me abominably. He says—he says he wouldn't take a cent with me! What do you think of that?"

Dardy Waldehast's eyes widened. "You don't mean to say that's what you're worrying about?" she asked. "That sort of thing looks very pretty, but it doesn't wash. He couldn't help it, even

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if he wanted to; you know that very well—*he* hasn't got anything."

"He insists that we should live on what he has got, anyhow. If you think he's trying to fool me, we can't talk. I have refused him; I am never going to see him any more."

"But, you silly girl! he had to say it; he couldn't have proposed to you if he hadn't said it. I don't know where your wits have gone, really!"

"You don't understand. He won't take it because he's a crank; he thinks the Trust is wicked. Oh, he made his reasons perfectly plain—my feelings were of no consequence! Of course he doesn't know anything about it—he has probably been misled by an Editorial in *The Flag*. He says he wouldn't touch our money. He wants me to do without it, and 'give my soul a chance'—he's strong on my soul, my food doesn't matter! He expects me to sacrifice all my comfort to his crazy notions. I never heard anything so selfish in my life."

"Well, I should say!" exclaimed Mrs. Waldehast. "Is that so? And I've been feeling real bad for him, feeding him up with tea and candy. . . . Does it weigh much, Bet?"

"Yes; I never liked a man that way before. I'd have done anything for him—and he treats me like this! I suppose it's life—as soon as a girl

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cares for a man really, he makes her suffer. They're only fit to be flirted with and made game of. I'd rather have married him than all the dukes in the peerage—and he doesn't mind if I don't have enough to eat!"

"Have you told your father?"

"Yes. Of course he doesn't want me to marry him, but he'd let me—I might have had a heavenly life if it hadn't been for *him!* My father offered to talk to him, but I can't permit that—making myself so cheap. Besides, it wouldn't do any good. He wants me to go to Europe with Howard."

"Who—your father does? Are you going?"

"What's the use of that? I'll never get over it as long as I live—in Europe or anywhere else. It has broken my heart, I could cry my eyes out." Her voice quivered. "What shall I do, Dardy? I'm so fond of him. 'Tisn't as if he were silly all through; it's only just this one point—he's as sensible as anybody else about most things."

"I wish I hadn't had him at the house so much."

"Oh, it's my fault—I saw where I was going; I could have pulled up in time if I had wanted to. Now it's too late! I'll never care for another man as I cared for *him.* I feel— feel about him just the way we used to talk before we put our hair up, Dardy."

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Mrs. Waldehast nodded. "Still, of course, that wouldn't last, anyhow," she said. "Even if you marry your romance, you lose it—I mean, your husband's quite different from the fellow you used to gaze at the moon about."

"I expect he's more like it than the other fellows, all the same."

"I don't know; Hal's all right, and I'm quite happy with him, but I do sometimes wonder what became of the Hal I got married to. *I* don't meet him. I guess there's a bad fairy that flies away with our bridegrooms while we're dreaming on the honeymoon—and when we wake, we just find husbands in their place."

"You can't console me that way."

"No. Well, you'd better talk him round. He's very smitten—you'll only have to cry."

"I don't see how I can speak to him again—we've quarrelled. Tell me what I can do; I don't care how much humble pie I eat as long as he doesn't know. Don't you ever remind me I said that, or I'll hate you!"

"I'd go to Europe if I were you; I can mention to him what boat you're crossing on. Go by one of the slow boats—you'll have time to twist him round your finger before you land."

"I couldn't forgive him right away—it'd look like jumping at him."

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"You can spare two days to be chilly in—two days last a long while at sea; they'll seem as long as the winter to him. That'll leave you four or five days to make him do what you want. You'll have trained him up in the way he should go long before you reach Liverpool."

"It's a heavenly notion," admitted Betty cheerfully; "it's sweet of you—I hadn't thought of that. But I'm not set on going to Europe with Howard; I know what it means—I'll never see him there; he'll leave me in the hotel, looking out of the window. I wish *you* were going."

"Me? We don't go till the fall."

"It's much better now than in the fall. It's perfectly ridiculous going over in the fall. London's empty in the fall—so's Paris. They're a dream in the spring. Come with me! I'll give you a dandy time. Come for a month and buy frocks. You shall come back as soon as I'm engaged."

"I should have to put off all my parties. And I'd be so scared about the baby."

"What's the matter with her?"

"There's nothing the matter with her, but there might be. With me at sea! I should go crazy."

"You can have a marconigram every day about the baby—and a cable every day when

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we're there. Say you will! You've been such a sweet—I was just broken up when you came in. Do be nice and see me through!" She hung round her, smiling, flushed, coaxing like a child. "You'd be such a help—Howard 'd be no good, he's got no tact. Think what it means: it's just my life's happiness I'm begging of you, Dardy! And we'll go by the *Caronia*—the staterooms have got the cunningest little electric heaters for one's curling-irons."

Dardy Waldehast reflected. "Oh, all right then," she said, "I'll go! Better let your father think you're going away to get over it, hadn't you?—leave his mind easy."

And when Lynch joined them, the girl said, "I've been telling Dardy she's got to take me to Europe. We want to go by the *Caronia*—the Cunard's so safe."

"Well now, that's first-rate, Mrs. Waldehast!" said the financier, relieved; "that's just what she wants to brace her up. I'll 'phone for a couple of suites for the next sailing. I'm real glad you're both going. Would you like to take Howard along?—he'll do to look after the baggage."

"Our maids can look after the baggage," said Betty. "A couple of suites and a stateroom for the maids will be enough; we don't want How-

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ard. Where shall we stay, Dardy? When you cable for the rooms, poppa, you might explain that 'Flowers' means flowers in the bedrooms; I'll never forget the last time we arrived—there wasn't a bouquet in a bedroom, it was frightful!"

"I'll fix it," said Lynch, thankful for her brighter tone. He had just been drafting a prospectus that would gull a multitude, but the young women found him gullible.

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CHAPTER IV

AFTER Mrs. Waldehast had told him carelessly that she was to sail with Betty Lynch on the *Caronia,* Keith hurried down to State Street and booked his passage by the boat, rejoicing at his "discovery"; and at the Metropolitan, later in the evening, Dardy Waldehast threw to Betty, in the opposite box, two little emphatic nods, which said, "I've done it!"

His elation was succeeded by the fear that the girl might not go after all. There were ten days of suspense. The prospect of seeing her constantly during the passage seemed to him too extraordinary to be fulfilled. Something must prevent this maritime heaven! When he drove to the pier at last he was more despondent than excited. A bad night hinted that a caprice had balked him at the final moment, that he was about to put the Atlantic between them.

The pier was chaos, apparently heaped with the luggage of the world. Aboard ship all the women were speaking at once, and every woman was saying "steward" or "grip." Below, in the

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great dining-saloon, a vaudeville artist queened it at one of the small tables, taking leave of some admirers; champagne popped to her triumphs in London; the table was gorgeous with roses and ribbons, the valedictory expressions of regard. He lost himself in a maze of passage ways, and captured his stateroom only after it had eluded him three times. There are staterooms which seem never to be twice in the same place. When he returned, order was prevailing. The deck grew clearer, the last adieux were gabbled. Neither Miss Lynch nor Mrs. Waldehast was to be seen. The endless crowd streamed off, instead of on, now—momentarily it looked as if everybody had been a visitor and nobody would be left to sail. Still they were unseen! He gazed forlornly round. And the hotel moved away.

He saw them, with a heart thump, about an hour later, after the chairs were set out. He knew that Mrs. Waldehast whispered, "Here's Keith," as he approached, for Betty gave a faint start of astonishment. But she did not turn her head. The other woman exclaimed, "Why, Mr. Keith!" with smiling surprise, and there was a few moments' awkward conversation. His embarrassment at intruding upon Betty, who was monosyllabic and obviously chagrined to find him there, made him very constrained. He

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envied the composure with which she contrived to mask her amazement at meeting him, after the first instant of dismay.

For the rest of the day they kept to their suites. The moonlit deck ungraced was pathetic.

In the morning they were not at breakfast. It was eleven o'clock before a stir with their cushions and rugs heralded their appearance. Mrs. Waldehast's comment on the weather in passing him was formal—evidently she had been asked to keep him at a distance. As to that, there was a smoking-room!

But, after all, it wasn't to admire the smoking-room that he had chosen the *Caronia!* He went to luncheon resolved to find his opportunity before the moon could mock him again.

The afternoon was blank until the tea-cups circulated. Then the two ladies settled themselves on the promenade deck, but were inseparable until a penetrating rain sent everyone scurrying into the lounge. "I think this is where I leave you?" said the confidant. "Well, don't be gone more than a minute or two!" murmured Betty. Mrs. Waldehast got up and shivered—she went below for a wrap. The girl remained on the divan, absorbed by a magazine. He reached her in three strides.

"Aren't you going to let me talk to you?"

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"I don't know why you should want to talk to me," she said, at once startled, proud, and reproachful.

"It's all I'm here for—I heard you were going."

"I think it was a great pity you heard. It was very foolish of Dardy to speak about it."

"I'm very grateful that she did! . . . You got my letter?"

She bent her head silently.

"I waited in the whole day for your answer. It was a very long day."

"What answer did you expect?" The tone was a rebuke.

"I hoped you'd say that you forgave me for hurting you. Will you? If you knew how bad I've been feeling——"

"I'd rather not hear about it, please!" she said. "I wish to forget."

"Me?"

After a second's pause she faltered, "Yes; what else can I do now?"

"You can say you'll marry me—I love you, I love you so much! Betty, I've felt a brute and a cad for saying what I did to you—I've seen that look in your eyes ever since. Won't you forgive me?"

"You told me we couldn't be happy together.

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What's the good of asking me to forgive you?"

"I told you we couldn't be happy on your money. I'm not asking you to marry me on that. If you care for me, can't you—can't you give it up?"

"Oh!" She made a movement of impatience. "You ask me to marry you one minute, and insult me the next. I think you're crazy!"

"You know I don't mean to insult you; it's much worse for me to have to speak about your money than it is for you to hear. But you've got to understand me. We needn't discuss my reasons any more; I'd much rather not. It amounts to this: if you marry me, you'll live on what I can make for you! It's what I implore you to do. If you'll only——"

Dardy Waldehast came back with a wrap on. "Hasn't it turned cold?" she said to Keith, as casually as if she had just been chatting with him. "Feel my hands!"

Betty was sorry that she had commanded such a quick return. But the ice was broken now, and, though the brief conversation was different from the one she had forecast, she felt in better spirits for it.

So did Keith. They talked again in the lounge after dinner. Somebody sang Tosti. And after

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Tosti, the deck was dry; but not dry enough for Mrs. Waldehast. He and Betty sauntered alone.

She looked at the sky, and paid a compliment to the moon.

"It's much better than it was last night," he said appreciatively.

"I didn't notice it last night; we didn't come up."

"No—and it gibed! I had been on the *Caronia* for æons without getting a word with you. The moon quoted Browning."

"Carnegie must have found a new field for his libraries. What did it say?"

" 'Never the time, and the place, and the loved one all together.' Oh, I was wretched last night! The deck was calling for you. . . . Do you know —do you know, I'm almost inclined to wish that I hadn't any principles! It would make things so much easier. I never thought I could be in a situation where I shouldn't know the right course from the wrong, but—but—— Is a man a selfish beast to try to make a girl renounce a fortune for him, or would he be only half a lover to let her go when they care for each other? . . . If I thought you'd regret yielding, I'd say good-bye and try to forget you, as I meant to do; I would, on my honour!"

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"Don't you think you may be unjust?" she asked haltingly. "I told my father what you said; he said you didn't understand. He said that every business has its enemies. Even if it is a small business, there is always somebody smaller who complains of it and says that it's wicked and tyrannical. My father has always been very good to me. If you knew how kind he has been to me, you wouldn't think he was a bad man. When you say what you do, I—— Well, I don't like to hear you speak ill of him!"

"I don't want to speak ill of him, Betty. It's because I don't want to hurt you that I can't justify myself to you. My tongue's tied; I can only say that I condemn—and it sounds like a prig. But I'm not the only person who condemns; you know that, dear, as well as I do."

"All the world may make mistakes," she pleaded. "You admitted just now that you weren't sure if you were right."

"I'm not sure if I'm right in asking you to give your wealth up, but I'm quite sure I'm right in refusing to share it. I'll never consent to do that. . . . The truth is, I haven't the courage of my own convictions. I'd rejoice to see you give it up—I'd think you a nobler woman. It makes me sick when I remember that your pleasures are paid for with other people's ruin—but I take

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fright at the responsibility of asking you to give it up for *me*. I ask you—and wonder if it's monstrous of me directly afterwards. My view is right, I know it's right; but then I shouldn't have expressed it to you if I didn't want you to marry me—and perhaps that makes me wrong!"

They strolled the length of the deck before she spoke.

"I think there'd be nothing gained if we were to talk for ever!" she said harshly. "It's just as impossible for you to understand my father's business as it would be for my father to understand your art. We won't talk about it any more, please."

"You're angry with me again?"

She shrugged a shoulder: "Oh, you have a right to your opinion, I suppose; I'm not angry with *you*."

"That's as cruel a thing as you could say."

"How can I help hating myself?" she exclaimed, with a break in her voice. "How do you suppose I must feel? Do you suppose these things are pleasant to me to hear? Do you suppose I forget that I needn't have heard them if I hadn't said what I did to you? You were going away—*you'd* never have known, *I'd* have had nothing to be ashamed of!"

"Are you sure of that?"

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"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember something you said to me that night? You said, 'I know about the people ruined, and the broken homes, and it doesn't make me feel good when I think of it.' Are you sure you'll always be able to put the thought aside? Are you sure the time can't come when the millions won't be enough—when the cries of the people will keep you awake? I don't want to invent a conscience for you, but are you positive that you'll never be ashamed?"

She paused by the taffrail, with averted face. The subtlety of her sex had gone, and left her helpless. She was no strategist, trying to bend his will now; she was a girl in love—with swimming eyes, and a lump in her throat, and a nose turning pink.

"I know just how you think about me," she gulped. "You think I'm fonder of my fortune than of you! It's not true."

"Betty!"

"I'm not, I'm not! And I know you're right—yes, I do know it, right down deep—but I don't want to hear about it. He's my father, you see. Take me! I don't want the money, I swear I don't—I only want to be happy!"

"O my sweet!" he stammered. "If there were nobody here! Betty, I'm holding you, I'm

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thanking God for you, I'm kissing your feet, and your tears, and your lips—my heart, my love!"

"I know I'm not as brave as I ought to be," she quavered, "but I will try! I want to be just what you'd like. You won't ever be sorry for marrying me, will you—I mean if I make a muss of things? It won't be that I'm not happy and proud to be your wife, only that I don't know how to set to work. I'll be content in ever so poky a cottage, and—and—I can't cook the dinner, I don't know how, but I'll learn all about art, so that you shan't feel you've married a fool. And you shan't paint portraits!"

Their hands clung together on the rail.

"I'd paint portraits all my life for you," said the man reverently; "I'd throw art overboard for you! I thought I loved you before, but I didn't know what love was—I didn't know what a woman could be. . . . And you won't have to cook the dinner, my queen, or live in a cottage; it won't be so bad as all that. I make——"

"Sh!" she whispered. "Never mind what you make—I *am* so tired of you and me talking money."

The first officer hurried by them, looking the other way.

"I've made a perfect fright of myself," she smiled, dabbing her fingers at her eyes, "and I

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haven't got a handkerchief." She borrowed Keith's: "You're beginning to provide for me already!"

"Betty, when will you marry me? Will you marry me as soon as we land?"

"Oh!" she laughed, in the glory of surrender. "Are you so afraid I'll change my mind?"

"No. But I want to prove to you how much I mean it. . . . Betty!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You've never called me 'Dick.'"

"I think 'Richard' suits you much better; you aren't 'Dick' a bit. Do they call you 'Dick'?"

"No—very few people do."

"Then *I* shall—Dick."

"Betty!"

"You'll know that name soon!"

"Where shall we live?"

"Dear," she pouted, "let's live in a moonbeam to-night. Don't let's be practical yet—I don't want to be practical any more. It doesn't matter where we live—if I make you happy."

At the piano somebody sang again. The lyric did not reach her, but the melody harmonised with the music of her mood. Presently the ship's bells jarred, startling them to the remembrance of time. "We must go down to Dardy," she murmured.

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"Will you say good-night to me first?"

Now, where they leant there was no one in view—she saw nothing but him, and the sea, and the stars. He drew nearer still. Her eyes closed.

Oh, it was worth it, worth it a thousandfold! She was sure she would think so as long as she lived.

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CHAPTER V

DARDY WALDEHAST was less optimistic. She divined the engagement directly they returned to the lounge, but she attributed capitulation to the wrong side. It was not till she was in Betty's stateroom with her that she was staggered by the facts.

"And what do you imagine your father's going to say?" she demanded. "You don't imagine for a moment he'll allow it, do you?"

"I mean to write to him at once; I'll mail the letter from Queenstown. It's my own life—if I'm satisfied, nobody else has any reason to complain. . . . Oh, be nice, Dardy!—I feel so happy and so good, and I don't want to think about anything horrid."

They sat on the couch, with their arms around each other.

"I'd never have believed it of you! . . . When is it supposed to be? Is he coming back to New York with us?"

"What for? I won't go back to New York. We'll live in London—we shall be married in London."

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"Will your father come over?"

Betty's eyes grew solemn. "I don't know," she said pensively, "I've been wondering. I've got to tell him, you see, that he mustn't settle anything on me—that I've promised not to take it. He won't be anxious to meet Dick after that! . . . And even if he did care to come, it'd be rather—rather painful for us all, wouldn't it? I don't want"—she plucked at her friend's lace—"I don't want to have a father there that Dick feels such things about. How can I?—it'll be Dick's wedding too. I—I think the church should be quite sweet for us both when he marries me."

The other woman kissed her, and they sat silent.

"*My* father's in the Trust as well," she said at last hesitatingly.

"Yes."

"*I've* never worried."

"You did one day, Dardy. Do you remember?"

"We were kids then—and thought we were heroines. What's the good of making our lives a misery? We can't alter it. Besides, I don't believe it's so bad as they say; it's all nonsense. Nobody has a word to say against Hal—and Hal

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never fussed about my money. . . . It's an awful pity—there's not one man in a million who would be such a fool. I don't know why it should happen to *you* to meet him! . . . Well, if your father doesn't come over for it, who'll be there?"

"Why, you!"

"I can't do it, dear—you mustn't let me in for that! It isn't what I was brought for. He'd be mad with me! And anyhow, I can't stay more than a month—you don't mean to have it within a month?"

"I—I don't know," said Betty; "yes, I expect we will. I won't want to buy a trousseau. . . . I shall write my father all you say; he can't say it's your fault."

"I'd never have believed it of you!" said the other again. "One thing—— Well!"

"What's that?"

"Well, of course, it needn't last—you can always have it your own way afterwards. But——"

The girl shook her head, startled. "I wouldn't do that!" she breathed. "That's over—I'm being real with him." Her gaze remained wide and introspective. "I wish you hadn't said that."

"I'm sorry."

"You don't know how I wish we hadn't

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schemed that day! I hate myself for having shammed to him; it'd be lovely if I hadn't meant him to come, and he had just surprised me here as he thinks he has. I'd like it all to have been quite true."

Mrs. Waldehast grimaced. "You'll make me envious in a minute—*I* shall never have those cranky and beautiful emotions any more! . . . You'd better turn in now, and dream of him. Pull the bedclothes up high, or your wings'll take cold! I'm not going to talk sense to you again to-night."

But she talked to Keith on the morrow.

"You know, Mr. Keith," she said, "I feel a great responsibility. Betty's father has trusted her to me, and I can't stand by and see her spoil her life. You must know as well as I do that this won't work—we don't live in a romance."

The throbbing of the steamer was very loud in his ears. "You think I am behaving badly to her?" he asked, when he found his voice.

"I think you are behaving badly to yourself. Mr. Lynch is devoted to her; he would consent to anything to make her happy. If you refuse to let him help you, you are wilfully turning your back on a fortune."

"She is prepared to live on less than I can offer her," he pleaded.

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"'Prepared'! Have you any notion of what she is used to? She has had her own account since she was eighteen, and the bank has been told to honour her cheques to any extent. My husband is a rich man, but Betty has spent as much in a year on nothing particular as I have spent on my house; everything solid has been paid for by her father."

"For Heaven's sake, don't imagine that I undervalue what she's doing," he exclaimed. "It's the grandest thing that a girl ever did for a man. I know that nothing, nothing on my side can be enough to—— I'll worship her for it. She's brave indeed!"

"She's in love. I don't quarrel with her for that—I'm not much older than she is; but I'm a married woman, and on this point I'm older than the two of you. While a girl's in love, everything the man says is a law of the Medes and Persians to her, she sees with his eyes; but afterwards, if she has any more backbone than porridge-and-cream, she begins to sit up and survey for herself again. I can't argue about Mr. Lynch's commercial reputation, *I* don't pretend to understand finance"—Keith did not miss the reflection—"but I do understand Betty, and I tell you that if you think her conversion to your view is anything but the fizz of the moment, you

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are making a big mistake. You will spare yourself and her a great deal of unnecessary pain by listening to reason at the start."

"If you mean 'by taking help from her father,'" he stammered, "I can't do it at the start, or at any other time. Betty thoroughly understands that. I'm sorry if I sound hard."

He sounded, on the contrary, very weak. It is one thing to have intense convictions, and another to uphold them to strangers. Keith would never have swayed mobs, he was too sensitive to a jeer. He felt like a boy beside her, nervous, shamefaced.

"Well!" her gesture was resigned, "you are entitled to your principles, of course; but I tell you frankly I think that, having the objection that you have, you did very wrong in the first instance to propose to her."

In the first instance, however, she had proposed to him.

"Do you mean that I ought to give her up?" he said unsteadily. "I'm so fond of her, Mrs. Waldehast—you're a woman, you ought to know how much I mean it! But if she wished she hadn't married me it'd be terrible; I'd rather it came to nothing than make her wretched for life. Do you mean that I ought to give her up?"

Dardy Waldehast flinched. A vision of Betty

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assailed her—Betty at white heat, Betty demanding wrathfully "how she dared?" After all, was the responsibility so great as she asserted? There would be plenty of time for Lynch to take decisive measures if he chose!

"I don't mean anything of the sort," she said; "I mean that you should agree to her father making a settlement. All she'll bring you, if you don't, is about a hundred pounds a year—her grandfather left her twenty thousand dollars when she was a child. Unless you object to that too?"

"It's the first I've heard of it," he said. "But why should I object? My objection is not to marrying a girl with money, but to living on atrocious money. Surely the difference is plain enough?"

"Atrocious" rent veils. But her own father was less prominent, Keith knew nothing of him—it was needless to challenge the word. Her thoughts darted to the scene of which Betty had reminded her—for a primitive moment she was a girl again, revolted, confiding to her friend that she would "run away and go into a store." Yes, she had fancied she was a heroine then! She regained her composure before the man could notice there was anything amiss. When he turned to her she was back in her world.

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"Well, you mustn't be vexed with me for my opinion," she said urbanely; "I wanted a chat with you because I've a great affection for her, but that doesn't mean that I don't like *you*."

"I shall always be deeply grateful to you, Mrs. Waldehast," he sighed; "I only wish you didn't think me so inhuman."

His misgivings had rushed back to him, intensified. He was "entitled to his principles," but was he entitled to force them upon Betty? Her consent was the "fizz of the moment"? Then she would live to bewail it! For there could be no going back afterwards; if she accepted the condition, she accepted it for good and all. Was he being fair to her in taking her at her word? There must be a serious talk between them today!

But when he was alone with her during the afternoon, he wondered how to broach the subject. His relief was as great as his surprise when she said archly, "So you've been having a bad time? Well, you aren't going to lose me if you don't want to—don't worry!"

"She told you?" he exclaimed. "You know?"

Her laughter brimmed over; the ingenuousness of Man was comic. "No, she didn't tell me; there are things that don't want telling, they shout for themselves. I saw you when you were

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drooping round with her. What is it you're trying to say to me? Come to momma and 'fess!"

"Betty," he said, "I can't joke about it, I'm very much in earnest."

She put her hands behind her back, and her head to one side. "Are you going to bid me an eternal farewell?" she rippled. "It isn't 'the time, and the place, and the loved one all together' now, because I don't feel like being pathetic a bit."

"Will you listen to me? I want you to be serious. Will you, sweetest?"

Her sunshine faded. She sat down slowly. "Go on, then," she said, raising big eyes.

"She's very fond of you. So am I, but perhaps my kind of love is bound to be more selfish than hers. *I* want you—*she* only wants to see you happy; her judgment here is better than mine. . . . It's because she's very fond of you that she spoke. She doesn't think that I've the right to let you do what you promised; she's sure you'd be sorry for it afterwards. I know you don't think so now, but it's quite true that the time may come when you'll feel that you acted like a madwoman—when you'd give everything on earth to be able to undo the mistake. Remember that you will never be able to undo it! You aren't making the sacrifice for six months, Betty,

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or for a year, but for always. And by-and-by, the gilt will be off the gingerbread, and the gingerbread may taste awfully stale, my love. That's all I can say, but I want you to think it over well, and to have a long talk with her."

"Do you suppose I haven't heard what she's got to say already?" she replied proudly. "What can she tell you about my feelings? She can only answer for her own. Is it Dardy Waldehast you want to marry, or me?" Her chin went up. "I daresay all you have said is very honourable and high-minded and well meant, but I find it no compliment. I promised to be your wife; I am not a little child, to have a gift handed back to her and be told that she doesn't know what she's doing."

"Betty!"

"I am an American girl, and——"

"You're the dearest girl in the world, but——"

"And I know my own mind. You offend me when you speak to me as if you thought I was a fool. If it's only my face you're in love with, I can't be very much to you; New York is full of men who're in love with me like that. I imagined your love was for myself."

"I love every mood of you! I love you when you're cross with me, and I love you when you cry—and I love you when you laugh and your

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eyes turn blue and you show that dimple in your cheek!"

Betty's chin was still disdainful. But the corner of her lips seemed to promise the dimple's dawn.

"Of course," she began, in her stateliest tones, "if you are alarmed at the prospect——" His interruption couldn't be overlooked. "You don't deserve it," she demurred, melting. "Well then! Don't be unkind to me any more. . . . I had something quite important to say to you when you started that foolishness, you silly boy!"

"God bless you!" exclaimed Keith. "I'll never start it again; it's over! What is it you were going to say?"

She stroked his hair the wrong way. "I have been thinking," she said, "that I can't be mean and keep our news secret; I must write from Queenstown—or, anyhow, as soon as we're in London."

He nodded. "Of course."

"It'd be rather horrid of me to leave people in the dark about it. Besides, Dardy's sure to write to him!"

"You mean your father will try to prevent it?"

"No, I don't; I am my own mistress. But" —she hesitated—"it's just possible he may decide

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to come over for it, though he won't be best pleased. I think I'd rather be married to you quite quietly, with nobody there but her and—— Do you want any relations?"

"I've none that I see much of. Yes, that's how I'd like it to be, that's just what I'd have chosen!" he said thankfully. "If you're sure you're not doing it merely for *me?*"

"I'd like it best myself. . . . Well, do you think it could be arranged—would it be too soon to please you?"

"Too soon?" he queried densely.

"I couldn't cable 'don't come'; I can't do that! Don't you see?"

He groped confused among these feminine subtleties. "I'm afraid I'm stupid?"

She could not deny it, but there was something of material pity in her touch. "The only thing I can do," she explained patiently, "is to say in my letter that I'm marrying you before —before anybody could get there. It'd be quite two weeks before anyone could arrive. Would you care to? are you so impatient as all that?"

"I'd like to marry you the day we land!" he cried, with enthusiasm; "I'll get a special licence. I don't know how long it takes, but——"

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"That's just what I was wondering," she said. "How do you find out?"

"I suppose you ask people," said Keith vaguely. "It never occurred to me to wonder how anybody got married. Evidently it's not difficult."

"It's always happening, isn't it?" said Betty. "I expect there are books that tell you. An encyclopædia wouldn't give it, would it?"

"Whitaker!" he said. "I should think Whitaker would give it. Perhaps there's one in the library."

They rang the bell, and inquired. In a few minutes the book was in their hands. They bent together over the index.

" 'Marriage'!" he read triumphantly. "Here we are! 'Marriage before Registrar'—they put that first. *You* wouldn't, though, would you?"

"No," she said, "I don't want a stuffy wedding like that. I'd like a litle church, quite simple, and very, very old, with ivy on it, and—— But we won't find that in the book! Let's see what comes next!—We can't attend to business if you try to kiss my fingers, Dick.—'British Subjects abroad,' 'By Banns——' "

"Banns take three Sundays," he said. "I know; my father was a clergyman."

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"Is that so? I never knew that! I won—I wonder if that's why you're so good?"

He laughed, colouring. "'Marriage Licences, Office for'—page 180. Don't these leaves stick!"

"They've put it on the same page as the Bankruptcy Department!" she said indignantly. "Now, isn't that tactless? You go to Knightrider Street—from ten till four. Well, just listen to this! 'Office for granting marriage licences, and Court of Peculiars'! Aren't they rude? Oh, this is all prosy, let's try back! . . . 'Certificates.' We haven't seen 'Certificates.' I daresay they'll tell us all about it—there are two pages of them."

Keith took the book. "This is it," he said: "'Special licences,' that's what I want. 'Are granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury——'"

"The Archbishop of Canterbury! That's just splendid!" chirruped Betty.

"'Under special circumstances——'"

"That's us!"

"'For marriage at any place, with or without previous residence in the district, or at any time, et cetera.' Well, they couldn't say more!"

"They do"—she leant over his shoulder; "you're skipping the fees."

"The fees don't matter twopence."

"I can't sanction anything approaching ex-

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travagance," said Betty severely; "I hope I am not marrying an extravagant man? Anyhow, you aren't through yet—there's a 'But.'" She pointed. "'But the reasons assigned must be such as to meet with his Grace's approval.' Oh! Do you think the Archbishop of Canterbury would approve of our reasons, Dick, if you put them to him very nicely?"

"I don't know," said Keith; "I've never met him. Wait a minute—'Licences are of two kinds,' let's try the other! . . . 'Licence is available as soon as it is issued.' That's sensible. Hello, here's something in italics, though! Er—'One of such parties hath had his or her usual place of abode for the space of fifteen days immediately preceding the issuing of the licence within the boundary.' Well, neither of us has! I've been away for months." The artist's brow was harassed. "It's a very complicated matter, I had better go to a solicitor."

"There's nothing wrong with fifteen days," she declared; "if you get the licence fifteen days after I write, it'll just suit. I couldn't marry you sooner than that and leave Dardy all alone, after bringing her away to please——" She stopped, embarrassed. "Oh, Dick! I do wish I had said 'Yes' at the beginning. I've been

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so hateful, you don't know. You do forgive me, don't you?"

"Forgive you! You're an angel from heaven!"

"No," she pouted, "You're not to think about me like that; it'd be such a come down for me afterwards. Don't love me for an angel, Dick—I want you to love me for the little cat I am."

He took her in his arms, and pictured the life they were to lead. He kissed the pout from her lips and the shadow from her eye. She cooed childish names to him, and they laughed together.

This was the conclusion of his "serious talk" to her about giving her up.

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CHAPTER VI

She wrote her letter from the Carlton. She began by saying that "Richard had been on the *Caronia* too," and felt guiltily that her father would have no faith in the implied coincidence. In Lynch's daughter the propensity to manœuvre was even stronger than it is in most women, but it disturbed her more than it does most women to be found out. "Money wasn't everything, and she was quite sure she would never repent; and she was going to be married on the 29th. Dardy, of course, would be present. Dardy was very much upset, and was writing to him herself."

It was a difficult letter. Though she phrased it as gently as she could, she had to dwell upon the point that he was to make no provision for her, and she knew that her acceptance of that condition would be crushing. She was uncomfortably conscious also that he would think less of her intelligence for it. She wanted to be alone when the letter was done. Mrs. Waldehast heard without surprise that she "had a headache."

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But an hour afterwards, when Keith called to put the engagement ring on her finger, she was vividly happy again. He had known a night of boyish terrors lest his ring should look paltry to her. Not only was she the one girl in the world, she was Miss Lynch; and although she had worn no other jewellery than a rope of pearls it was inevitable that she should compare his gift mentally with the rings of her friends. His anxiety had led him to choose one wildly disproportionate to his position. Her enthusiasm was not feigned when he opened the case. Mrs. Waldehast herself admitted later that it was "just sinfully sweet of him."

In the evening he took them to the theatre. He had been extending his knowledge of the marriage laws meanwhile, and Betty learnt that the address of his studio, near the Foundling, was an obstacle in the way of the little church with ivy on it. He had decided to remove to rooms "at Hampstead or somewhere for the fifteen days—it wouldn't be a scrap of trouble."

They argued the matter in whispers during the progress of the play. She said that she wasn't a baby, and, with the best of bridal egotism, pronounced "one church as good as another." He wasn't to be silly! When was that studio of his to be exhibited to them? she was eager to see

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it. Talking of Hampstead, wasn't there a Jack Straw's Castle there? She doted on ruins—she'd like to go over it one day. There were a lot of other "sights" in London that she ought to have seen; he must remember she was a foreigner. They compared lists of their neglected duties, and she was amazed to discover that the Englishman had a worse record than she. Yes, this comedy was quite good! She liked the Carlton very much, especially the servants; but the portions in the restaurant were ridiculously big, even as one for two persons—she had ordered a lovely dessert and been unable to touch it when the time came. Dardy expected him to come back with them to supper. He couldn't? That was horrid. No, they wouldn't go somewhere with him instead! Well, would he come back and smoke a cigarette in the hall? It was a very pleasant evening indeed—and the author of the piece, who was in the stalls behind them, felt homicidal.

The ladies were entertained at the studio on the next afternoon, and Betty was secretly dismayed by its aspect. Flights of stone steps, and a sparsity of comfort after one had toiled to the top, contrasted very badly with the studios of the eminent that she had viewed in Paris. She resolved that the studio when they took a house

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should be far worthier of the august pictures that she didn't understand. However, the host was so fervidly grateful for the visit that she offered to repeat the boon.

"I hope you didn't mind, Dardy—he couldn't have given us nicer cakes and candies, could he?"

"I mind nothing, except his income, and the absence of an elevator," sighed Mrs. Waldehast.

"I'm sure the tea was as humorous as a bad picnic. The dilapidated crone who shuffled in with the cups as big as young wash-bowls was a dream."

There were various things for the lovers to arrange during the next few days. To determine their home before the 29th was impossible, and they resolved to do their house-hunting afterwards; in the intervals, though, it would be fun to go out and acquire a few necessaries for it —just for an hour sometimes, when Dardy didn't feel like leaving the hotel! They made two or three such expeditions, and Betty developed shining virtues in the process of qualifying herself for a poor man's wife.

She impressed upon him at the start that he was to be "very careful." She said, "There must be no more wicked loveliness like this ring; I mean it, Dick! It would hurt me. You've got to treat me like a sensible woman." And her

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plan for coping with his tendency towards extravagance was charming—she forbade him to take out more than a certain amount, and set her dainty face against "cash on delivery." "Now, how much shall it be this morning?" she would say, perpending before she pinned on her hat. It might be that they agreed upon twenty pounds, or upon five; but, whatever the sum was, it had to be the limit of the morning's expenditure. Excepting for two shillings; she allowed him two shillings in excess of the sum, for the purpose of ice-cream.

Then they would sally forth in quest of an essential cabinet, or a dinner service, and come back the happy owners of a superfluous gramophone or a Nankin jar with a branch of almond blossom in it. It did not occur to Betty, to dim her complacence, that they had been less practical to spend the money on a superfluous gramophone than on the essential cabinet. Never did they spend more than he took out!—and her triumphant air of self-righteousnes was beautiful to see.

Lynch's reply to the news came by cable, and it was brief. He said nothing of his chagrin, nor did he remonstrate; but plainly he had no belief that his daughter's spiritual elevation would be maintained: "When you propose to come off the

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roof, let me know." That was all. It vexed her. She did not ask for her renunciation to be acclaimed, but she wished it to be respected. The reward for being a heroine is the approval of one's own conscience; still, it is annoying when people don't recognise one's rôle.

The cable absolved Mrs. Waldehast from further responsibility, and she was able to countenance the situation with a lighter heart now. At this stage, too, it occurred to Keith that he ought to manifest the relatives of whom he had spoken. It would probably be the correct course to take, though he contemplated it with some aversion. His uncle had dissuaded him very strongly from resigning the clerkship, and had always been sore with him for disregarding the advice, especially so since his progress had proved him right. The gentleman, moreover, had small faith in the possibility of any really good woman being discovered outside the United Kingdom.

Sir Percival—he had been knighted during the last decade—was proud of many things. He was proud of his title, of his great business, which had been quadrupled since he succeeded to it, of his sons in the firm, and his youngest son, Stanley, who was in Holy Orders; not least was he proud of his reputation for rectitude, which stood high in the City. But when he boasted—and it was

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often—one gathered that his noblest deed was to be born an Englishman.

Like his nephew, he held that every man had a duty to his country, and his patriotism took the form of disparaging every country on the Continent. He declined to cross the Channel; his annual holiday, with a thrifty wife, was spent in Bognor, or some other south coast spot equally depressing, to which they travelled third class. "There is too much want in the world for us to waste money on self-indulgence," he would say. But he did nothing with his money to abate the want. He had admonished his brother for allowing Richard to study art in Paris—partly because art was frivolous; and partly, because Paris was in France. He frowned upon alien improvements, although the insular variety might be impracticable. No "time-saving appliance" emanating from foreign brains was ever favoured by Keith & Sons; the office was one of the last in East India Avenue to adopt the typewriter, and one of the few that still exalted the native mahogany desk, with drawers that took five minutes to lock, over the transatlantic article, in which they fastened automatically. Upon America, indeed, Sir Percival was particularly severe; he regarded its nation as swindlers to a man, and its achievements as an insult to the British

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Throne. No one could have seemed less likely to favour an engagement to Lynch's daughter.

Still, one ought to produce relations! And Mrs. Waldehast had shown a lively interest in the title when she heard it. Keith went to call upon his uncle and aunt.

They had a large, meagrely furnished house, and utilitarian grounds, in Clapham Park, which was not the Clapham where Keith and his mother had had their lodgings. There are four Claphams. Clapham Park is imposing, Clapham Common is successful, Clapham Road is genteel, and Clapham Junction is low. Clapham Park, however, is as awkward a neighbourhood to reach as can be found in the whole of London, and a highly inconvenient place of residence for anybody who doesn't keep a motor-car or a carriage. Sir Percival disapproved of motor-cars and carriages for those blessed with health. On fine mornings he walked briskly to the station of the City and South London Railway; on wet mornings the livery stables supplied a cab. As to Lady Keith's convenience, "I am grateful to say that my dear wife is vigorous," he would explain piously, "and the Lord gave her legs." Keith overtook the vigorous lady trudging resignedly along the miles which have recently been re-

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christened "King's Avenue." She had been buying "serviceable things" in Brixton.

"Well, I never!" she murmured. "I'm just going in. Your uncle ought to be back by now—I made him promise to come home early to-day, he's been poorly of late. Nothing serious; he's been suffering with a touch of rheumatic neuralgia. We were afraid it was his heart, but the doctor says it all comes from the same thing. Such a relief to us all! The damp has been so trying, it's pulled him down terribly." After an appreciable pause, she added, "And how are *you?*"

"I'm all right, thanks," he said. "I've been away—in America."

"Really? Still painting, Richard?"

"Yes," said Keith drily, "I'm still painting."

"Your uncle often speaks of you," she announced.

He tried to look flattered. The lady sighed. "And what are you painting?" she asked, in the tone in which she might have said, "And what are you going to be when you grow up, my little man?"

They had reached the gate, and the gardener informed them that Sir Percival had returned. They found him in the drawing-room, reading the evening papers.

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"What, Richard? This is indeed an unexpected honour!" he exclaimed, with ponderous pleasantry.

"How are you, sir? I'm sorry to hear you have been under the weather."

The knight related his symptoms. "Where do you spring from?" he inquired at last.

"He tells me he has been to America," said Lady Keith. "You might touch the bell, Richard; I'm dying for a cup o' tea."

"America? Have you? A strange country!" He shook his head heavily. "A very strange country!"

"A very wonderful country, sir."

"Wonderful? Well—y-e-s, yes, I suppose it may even be called 'wonderful.' Scarcely the word I should apply, though, I think. 'Wonderful' suggests to the mind something worthy of admiration. 'Wonderful'—— However! Help yourself to a cigarette." He was smoking a cigar. "What were you doing there?"

"I went over to paint a portrait of a Society woman, Mrs. Waldehast. I don't know if you've heard of her?"

"I think I have heard the name," said Sir Percival. "A profitable commission?"

"Very."

"Good! I should like to see you have more

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encouragement. I'm afraid, though, that pictures——" He shook his head again. "Well, well, we mustn't cry over spilt milk! 'Waldehast'? Wall Street, I think?"

"I really don't know," said Keith. "They're very well off, they entertain a great deal. . . . Mrs. Waldehast is very intimate with Miss Lynch."

"Lynch's daughter?" exclaimed his aunt. "I didn't know he had one. Did you see him too?"

"Lynch!" put in Sir Percival sapiently. "The true embodiment of the American spirit!"

"Surely, sir——? The outcry against him in America is a thousand times stronger than it is here."

"My dear Richard"—his emphasis was touchy—"the Americans who cry out would all act in exactly the same way if they had the power. Commercial integrity is unknown in America—perfectly unknown! You have just given us an instance; you speak of Society people who are 'very intimate' with him. Do you imagine that English people in a similar position would be intimate with a—a notorious scoundrel, a man who has defied the laws of his country, who would be in prison if justice were administered

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there as fearlessly as it is with Us? He is—he is—— However!"

"I am not defending Lynch; I only say that he is not typical."

"I can tell you of one incident in the career of these Society people's intimate acquaintance," went on Sir Percival, addressing his wife, for the benefit of his nephew. "The Trust had arranged a 'deal' in B stock, and Lynch ruined a medical man, with whom he was on most cordial terms, by deliberately giving to him, amongst others, a false tip. He advised the man to buy as much B stock as he could—and to buy before noon the next day, or 'he would have to pay twenty dollars more; the tip was confidential'! Of course Lynch counted upon his telling just one friend, and upon the friend telling another, and so forth. The quotation opened firm the next day—nearly every broker seemed to have orders to buy B stock; but before twelve o'clock it was known that the Trust had been a continuous seller, and was still forcing sales. It was supposed that something was wrong; there was a panic. Every buyer in the morning was a seller at best in the afternoon. The Trust had sold half a million stock by twelve o'clock—and had bought it back before evening at an average of ten points less! In other words, the Trust netted

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five million dollars, and hundreds of people were ruined in a day to pay for it. Lynch's lie cost the medical man the savings of a lifetime, and he was found dead in his consulting room. When someone reproached Lynch for it, he sneered. 'What of it? In business, everybody for himself!' he said."

The lady signified her horror, and passed the buttered buns. Keith decided not to announce his engagement this afternoon, the conversation had started on unfortunate lines; he must make an excuse at the hotel. But when he rose to leave, they would not hear of his going; he was pressed to remain and dine. After all, it would be better to get the announcement over before he went—if he were to stay, there would be three or four hours before him! He sat down again; and his aunt displayed with reverent hands a stole that she was embroidering for Stanley. She was "sorry that Keith hadn't come on the morrow instead, when Stanley was expected." Sir Percival hospitably interposed, "However!"

It was a dismal household. The two elder boys had married hurriedly, and now that they had escaped, it was duller still. Keith scarcely knew them, but he sat regretting that they were not there. Dinner came when fortitude was at its last inch.

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The adjournment was made in silence. A gloomy parlourmaid stood at attention by the sideboard. Sir Percival, erect, muttered in a deep bass, which had in it something peremptory, "O Lord, relieve the wants of others, and give us grateful hearts." And, having shifted the responsibility, tucked in.

He liked a good port—his prejudices against things Continental stopped short at vineyards—and it was when the port was reached that Keith plucked up courage to impart his news.

"By the way," he began, "I have something to tell you both; I'm going to be married."

"Married?" faltered Lady Keith. Her husband stared.

"Er—we must congratulate you," he said.

"Thanks very much. I hope—I should like her to meet you."

"Oh yes, you must bring the lady to see us one day. Your aunt will be—— Eh, Emily?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure," she said vaguely.

"An engagement of long duration?"

"No, it's very recent. I met her when I was in New York."

"An American lady?" He was raising his glass, and it paused midway.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, she's the daughter of the man we were speaking about—Lynch. I

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need hardly say she takes a very different view of things from her father. She—— Nobody could fail to admire her in every respect! She——"

"You're engaged to Lynch's daughter?" Sir Percival gasped. His mouth remained ajar. He set his wine back on the table, untasted. After a second or two he ejaculated, with mingled awe and incredulity, "You?"

"Lynch?" quavered his wife. "The richest man in the world?"

"One of the richest. Of course she doesn't take any money from him now, or later. I stipulated for that. I think, sir"—he threw back his head proudly—"I think very few girls, American or English, could do a greater thing than *she* is doing? She won't touch a shilling of his money; she is content to live on what I can make for her."

Sir Percival could be heard breathing. "You have stipulated that she shall take no money from him?" he stuttered.

"Naturally."

"Richard!" cried his aunt. "Why, he could give her millions!"

"I suppose he could." He was beginning to feel astonished. "Shameful millions. The amount doesn't affect the question."

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"My—my dear Richard," said Sir Percival stertorously, "you astound me! *You* are engaged to Lynch's daughter—and you oppose his making a settlement on her, you oppose his taking a course that is only fit and proper? It's inconceivable! What—what possible justification have you for such a—such an act of madness?"

Dumfounded, Keith looked from the gentleman to the lady. She met him with, "I must say I think you're flying in the face of Providence!" Her eyes were aghast.

"Your view is intemperate," continued Sir Percival, in a suaver and judicial tone. "Let us be just. Above all things, my dear boy, let us be just. The lady is his child; it is no more than right that on her marriage with one less richly blessed with worldly possessions her father should provide for her maintenance in the style she is accustomed to. It is his duty. You do not—if you will allow me to point it out to you—you do not influence him to fulfill the many duties that he neglects already by resisting his fulfilment of one more. You are marrying her, I take it, from motives of—er—esteem, and so forth; your sentiments cannot be in any way impugned by your participating in her financial advantages. It develops upon you to do so. My own sense of honour"—he said it in large capitals—"is, I

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think, sufficiently well known for my assurance on the matter to have some weight."

Keith felt very young, and was very contemptuous of himself for being disconcerted. Momentarily he was bending over a ledger again, nervous at the sound of his stately uncle's footstep in the outer office.

"Do you consider that Lynch's money has been fairly made?" he asked. "The whole thing resolves itself into that."

It was the other's turn to be disconcerted; his denunciation of Lynch was awkwardly recent. He sighed. "This takes me back—I recognise your mother," he murmured. "How I warned her against those wretched shares! You remember, Emily? She also was—— However!"

Keith squared his jaw. Was he to assert himself only to poor little Betty?

"I'm afraid we're wandering from the point. The point is that I—in common with the rest of the world—regard Lynch's millions as damned——"

"Hush!" The knight's white hand expostulated.

"I beg Aunt Emily's pardon—and yours, if I have shocked you. We say that a fortune which has been acquired by wholesale trickery and oppression is an infamous fortune, that one man

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has no right to use his abnormal wealth to crush a poorer multitude out of existence. In half the States of America he has ground men to their death, and forced women and girls to worse than death——"

"Really, I must remonstrate! Such allusions are unseemly." His nostrils exhaled virtue. The lady pursed her mouth; if she had worn a fringe, her eyebrows would have disappeared altogether.

"And we hold him accursed for it," concluded Keith doggedly. "If we admit we were mistaken in thinking such methods evil, then he is owed a world-wide apology; but while we continue to think what we do of them, the man who was willing to profit by the methods would be as culpable as Lynch!"

Sir Percival tapped the table, musing. He rose, and forced a smile.

"Always headstrong, Richard," he said, with affectionate regret; "always self-willed!"

The drawing-room was more oppressive than before, and the visitor said good-night as early as he could. Lady Keith, who had resumed her reverential stitches for the clergyman, repeated her counsel against "flying in the face of Providence" as she turned a cheek to be saluted. The knight magnanimously asked for "Miss Lynch's

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address, that we may call upon our future niece."

They called, and toadied her.

This was Keith's first experience of the advice that people had to give him.

His second was with Tomlinson. Tomlinson shared a studio in the same block, and had chanced to be presented to Betty and Mrs. Waldehast one day when they came. He was an elderly little failure, with an unobservant manner and acute observation—for everything except landscape, which he painted. Apparently he had been unconscious that the ladies were worth looking at, but the next time he met Keith on the stairs he said timidly, "It was a treat to see those friends of yours. They're the kind that glide and sink."

"That do what?"

"They move and sit down properly—the right sort of women glide and sink; the others bounce and bump. I should like to see them again."

"I daresay you will," said Keith. "Come inside and have a drink."

Tomlinson crept in, with his hands in his trouser-pockets and his pipe between his teeth. With early training, he might have been a successful journalist, or perhaps a detective; an enthusiasm for art had condemned him to cheerfulness upon a pittance, and other men's whisky.

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But for a relative somewhere, he would have starved.

"Done anything with the studies you brought back from America yet?" he inquired.

"No, I haven't been working, I'm not in the vein. Are *you* busy?"

Tomlinson nodded absently. He had been busy making the round with a couple of sketches and failing to sell them. His feet ached. Presently he would put the canvases back on the easel and devoutly admire them. Mercifully he did not know that he couldn't paint, and nobody but a dealer would have been brutal enough to say so to his sensitive face.

"Tomlinson, I'm going to be married."

Tomlinson smiled pensively. "Well!" he said, not committing himself.

"To Miss Lynch, the lady you saw here. I shall be giving this place up as soon as I can. Know anyone who'd like to take it off my hands?"

Tomlinson reflected. Not that there was the slightest prospect of his suggesting a tenant, but it had the air of being "more in the swim" to reflect. "No," he said, "at the moment I can't say I do. When is it to be?"

"On the 29th."

"So soon? No relation to Lynch, I suppose? She is an American, I think?"

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"Yes. She's his daughter."

"My dear fellow!" gasped Tomlinson, dropping his pipe. "I say! I do congratulate you, upon my word. Lynch's daughter! You aren't joking?"

"Oh no, it's right enough."

"And is he—agreeable?"

"Well, I don't exactly know; it doesn't much matter. I'm marrying her because I'm fond of her, not because her father is a millionaire."

"Oh, just so, just so!" said Tomlinson hastily. "Still, a million or two to go on with—what? 'Giving this place up'?" He laughed. "Yes, I suppose you will! We—we shan't be able to know you soon, eh?"

Keith explained, at some length, and Tomlinson listened with dumb attention. Then he chuckled knowingly.

"You're pulling my leg," he said.

"I'm perfectly serious. Why should it astonish you? You know what the Trust is; I think I've heard you rather eloquent on the subject."

"Oh, as far as that goes—— All the same, I mean to say—— Well, it's going rather to extremes, isn't it?"

"What is? Not to pocket one's conscience when there's money to be made by it?"

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"My dear chap! 'Pocket one's conscience'? It isn't a question of anything of the sort. The question is what good do you do? That's what you've got to look at—what good do you do?" In view of millions declined, the gentle, deprecatory little man grew excited, even dogmatic. "Is anybody benefited? does it improve matters in any way? The Trust goes on whether you're sensible, or whether you choose to sacrifice a fortune to a theory. No one will thank you for such a piece of quixotism, no one will have any reason to thank you! I think I may say my honesty is above the average, but I tell you frankly *I* should have no scruples." Et cetera.

Then there was Premlow, whose "Shelling the Peas" and "How Does it Suit Me?" had both been immortalised in Summer Numbers, and framed in so many lodging-houses. Premlow's argument was that one would be more than justified in luxuriating on a scandalous income if one devoted a considerable portion of one's wealth to charities. "A far more practical form of what d'ye call it, my dear boy, than riding the high horse!" And there was Tracey Wynne, the literary stylist, who ejaculated "Tosh!" And there was the sceptic who was reminded of Carlyle's philosophy when his wife was excruciated with toothache—"It will not be permanent."

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It was remarkable how the news spread, and with what promptitude many persons who had called Lynch's business methods "an outrage on humanity" would have accepted a share of his profits.

For the honeymoon, Paris had been suggested. Betty had travelled on the Continent much more than Keith, but she had missed, or forgotten, most of the things that he craved to see there. From Rome she had brought only a vague remembrance of the Michael Angelos—" 'The Eternal Separating Light from Darkness' was one of the frescoes on the ceiling somewhere, wasn't it?" She had spent a week in Vienna, but was not sure if she had seen Rembrandt's portrait of his mother. In Dresden, the Sistine Madonna had been impressed on her mind chiefly by the fact that it was reproduced on all the postcards in the shop windows. Eager to be a companion, she had told Keith that he must take her to the Louvre and teach her to understand—he must explain to her why the pictures that he loved best were beautiful. And he had promised, promising himself at the same time not to bore her. Then she decided that she would prefer the country in England—"that would be new to her." She refrained from adding that Paris, visited economically, would also be new to her, and less pleas-

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antly so. They wanted rusticity without discomfort, rural scenes to wander in, and civilised quarters to return to. Finally, an hotel between Tunbridge Wells and the village of Rusthall was chosen. If the weather were kind, the situation would fulfil their requirements perfectly; and if it were wayward, they would try the other side of the Channel after all.

On the evening of the 28th, Betty opened a door and saw her maid packing for her. The wardrobe that was to serve as her trousseau was not particularly extensive, nor was there any valuable lace among it—she had always elected to dress with comparative simplicity and seldom paid more than thirty or forty guineas for a frock. Having sailed in May, and expecting to be absent only for a month, she had brought scarcely any of her furs, overlooking the fact that she was bound for a country where the winter often began in September and continued into June. The only precious thing among her belongings here was her rope of pearls, and that was worth so great a sum that she felt she would be inconsistent to keep it. She meant to give it to Dardy Waldehast—she had it in her hands as she watched the maid kneeling before a trunk. The woman was going back to New York at the end of the week, and the thought came to Betty,

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as she paused there, that she was watching a maid pack for the last time. The task looked more than ever odious. She was about to part with her pearls cheerfully, but it dismayed her to reflect that henceforward she would have to submit herself to the turmoil of packing. However, she would not dwell on the point.

"I want you to have this, Dardy," she said presently; "I shan't put it in."

"What on earth——?" said the other.

"I don't think it would be fair; I promised empty pockets—it wouldn't be playing the game to go to him with a property round my neck."

"I never heard anything to equal you! It's too beautiful to last. Anyhow, I can't take a gift like that from you. If you're anxious to get rid of it, you had better send it back to your father."

"What do you propose that my father should do with it—wear it in his hair? I want you to take it, Dardy; you will oblige me."

Mrs. Waldehast shrugged her shoulders: "I'll take it, but I shall give it to him when I arrive. You're a regular simpleton to let it go."

But Betty did not feel a simpleton, she felt very happy—and very brave. The prospect of the packing was forgotten—it was the eve of her wedding day. "I'd think you a nobler woman," he had said. And she was being nobler! she

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triumphed in the consciousness. Oh, she would always live up to his ideal—no doubt one could get used to anything. Besides,—she hated to hear Dardy suggest it, and she never harboured the thought, but she couldn't help its encouraging flight across her reverie in moments,—it was just possible that later on he might change his mind! Not that she would ever ask him to do such a thing!—she was thoroughly sincere.

She felt very happy—and very brave. There would be none of the pageantry that she had always pictured for her wedding day—no strings of carriages, no train-bearers and bridesmaids, no dazzle of presents at a reception, no motor-car to take her away. But she was marrying the man she loved. And after she had kissed her friend good-night, she knelt, and pleaded, "Help me to be as good as I mean to be! And if I do find it a little rough sometimes, O God, pray don't let Dick guess!"

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CHAPTER VII

"LOVELIEST!"

"Mmps?"

"What shall we do this afternoon?"

"It's time you did some real work, lazy-bones. Come out and paint the Happy Valley."

"I can't paint out of doors this afternoon, the changes are so rapid when it's sunny. Let me do another sketch of you—I haven't painted your dimple yet."

"It makes one awful conceited to marry an artist—there'll be enough portraits of me soon to fill a gallery. Where shall I sit, Master?"

"Here, Most Unique!"

Then she would sit in his chair, and stroke his hair the wrong way again, and be tender, or wayward, but always the most wonderful thing that ever wore hairpins and was miscalled "mortal." He had told her on the third day that there were twelve of her, and that he never knew which "Betty" he was to see next. She said she wouldn't allow him to be nice to the "other eleven," but he found it entrancing. He was the playmate

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of a child, and the disciple of a woman; he was teased by a coquette, and captured her to clasp a wife.

Aflame, he painted her in a white dinner-gown, and in a rose peignoir; he painted her coiling her hair before the mirror. He painted her with that chin of hers scorning him, and called the sketch, "Mr. Keith, You will please Take Me Back to the Room." "Oh, the disdain of the dearest!" he cried, and showered kisses on her, rejoicing.

Also he was the lady's maid of a girl who didn't know how to fasten her frocks—and who found it perplexing that her hat, and her gloves, and her sunshade failed to come to her of their own accord.

The white dinner-gown had been especially maddening. It became her so well, and she had wanted to surprise him in it one evening; she sent him away long before the first gong was beaten, so that she might have plenty of time. It was not until she had done her hair and was approving it in the glass, that she remembered that the bodice fastened down the back.

She rang for help from the chambermaid, but the woman's fingers seemed to be all thumbs, and at last, when she uttered a triumphant "There!" after twenty exhausting minutes, it was perceived that she had strained all the hooks

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into the wrong loops. A tantrum sent her flying to her washhand-stands.

And the second gong had sounded a long while ago.

It dashed the bride's pretty intentions to the ground that Keith knocked at the door, and was admitted, looking very nice and composed, while she sat deserted on the edge of the ottoman, hot and despairing.

"Oh, Dick," she exclaimed tearfully, "I'm such a fraud!"

"What's the matter?"

"I can't fasten this loathsome dress down the back. That Annie's a born fool! Go and have your dinner, darling—don't wait for me."

"My poor little kiddymalinks! Let me try if *I* can button it."

She laughed.

"I might," he urged; "I'd be better than Annie."

"I was laughing at the 'button'—they aren't buttons, savage, they're little hooks and loops. Well, go on then, try—if you don't want anything to eat."

It was a superhuman task. The hidden hooks began on the right-hand side, and, when he was getting in the way of discovering them there, dodged on to the left. The evasive loops were

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even more infuriating; it demanded genius to decide, without fatal experiment, which was the loop and which was the pattern of the lace. Yet his perseverance was likewise superhuman. And wasn't it Olympian to be fastening her bodice? Although their dinner when they got it had lost the bloom of its first youth, they were joyous—and deserved their champagne.

They had no fault to find with their Eden. In their indolent moods they sauntered, or sat, under the great trees of the grounds. If the thought of shops tempted, they strolled across the common to the Pantiles, where the airs from a modern bandstand did not drown the rustle of a stately past. They bought the print of bygone belles and gallants, or book-markers and brushes of the native ware. One evening they witnessed *Dick Turpin's Ride to York,* in a tent, and when Tom King, the Gentleman Highwayman, cried: "We are pursood! 'Ark, I 'ear the sound of 'orses' 'ooves!" Betty was in raptures with the performance.

Oftenest they turned to the right, past the little post office next door to the hotel, where they sent their telegram to Mrs. Waldehast before she sailed. Then they wandered into Rusthall. Village children who had never smelt the sea ran perilously on the rocks that it had left behind,

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but after the sand-castles and the children, all was grass and silence, excepting for the birds.

Betty liked Rusthall better than "The Wells." She liked the sight of the little ivy-clad church on the edge of the Happy Valley; and there was the nook that she had found, perched above the sweep of woodland. She said that they "must often come back there when they grew up."

"It's just the kind of church I meant," she explained once.

"But we couldn't be more content," said Keith. It was the day that he had painted her contemptuous, and the marvel of their marriage was full upon him. The nook was newly magical this afternoon. "To think how nearly I lost you! To think that I might have been in the studio now——"

"Being industrious!"

"Eating my heart out! I wonder if you'd have been remembering me—I wonder what you'd have been doing now if we hadn't married?"

"What time is it in New York?"

He looked at his watch: "It's still morning—about twelve."

"Isn't that funny! Perhaps I'd have been in bed and asleep, if I had been out late last night."

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"Then you wouldn't have been thinking of me at all. While *I* was——"

"Stamping up and down the studio and calling for Miss Lynch! Well, I might have been dreaming about you, you know. Or perhaps I'd have given a thought to you when they brought in my coffee."

"Had you a wonderful room, Betty?"

She nodded.

"Tell me what it was like."

"What do you want to know for?"

"How I wish *I* could give you a room like it!"

"Goose! Do you think I care?"

"Don't you?"

"Do I?" she whispered.

Their eyes dwelt together, and he grasped her hand.

Rain clouds had sombred the sky, and the landscape was purpling. Far afield little curls of smoke wreathed bluely in the haze—the smoke of homes.

"I'm afraid there's a storm brewing!"

But the power of the church survived; she loitered before the gate, as she always did.

"We'll come here on Sunday morning if you like?" he said.

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"I'd like to peep in now," she told him, and he followed her inside.

It was very quiet and dim there. They waited for a moment by the door, looking towards the east window.

"It's just the kind of church I meant," she repeated under her breath.

He answered with a touch upon her arm, and they crept across the tiled floor together, and paused at the foot of the chancel steps.

She murmured, "It's just here we should have stood."

The man's touch slid from her arm to her hand, and the hand welcomed it. Then, as they moved away, she dropped behind him. When he looked round she was but half-way down the aisle, musing again.

Her fingers greeted his return, but her gaze still brooded on the window. Presently she faltered, "Dickie, I want to 'fess. I *wasn't* surprised that day."

"When?"

"On the boat. I told her to tell you I was going, Dickie; I mean to make you give in. . . . I feel so small!"

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CHAPTER VIII

THE accommodation at the studio was much too primitive for them to live there even for a few weeks, so on their return to town they stayed at another hotel, and were provided with a fresh list of disappointments by a house agent every day. It was not such a spacious hotel as the one that they had left, nor was it quite so opulent. The other women's appraising gaze at Betty was not always due to the fact that the newspapers had made her marriage famous—every woman there did not recognise her name; but every startled pair of feminine eyes recognised the hang of her skirt. Despite the hooks and loops, Keith had privately resolved that if he could help it she should never dress more cheaply—the man no longer exists who sees a girl perfectly gowned and, "duped by the subtle simplicity," thinks that her clothes cost ten pounds a year. His ghost still haunts fiction, but the man is in his proper place.

After various expeditions to Chelsea, where everything was either too dear or too nasty,

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they decided upon a semi-detached house in St. John's Wood. The street, unspoilt by the railway, was called Sibella Road, and the house was called something grandiloquent. However, there was the simple remedy of reducing it to a number. A small cheque improved the landlord's taste in wall-papers, and it remained for Mr. and Mrs. Keith to furnish the villa more completely than with a gramophone and a Nankin jar.

"Nothing happens but the unforeseen"—a proverb that has more truth than most of its companions. When Keith had vaguely imagined himself enlisting among the Benedicts, he had had visions of wanderings and hunts, of delightful "finds" and precious "bits"; to go to a firm and order *en bloc* had seemed to him a frenzy of philistinism; yet this was just what he and Betty did, for they were eager to be settled as soon as possible.

There was an establishment in the West End which undertook to equip anything from a cottage to a mansion, and to show in advance precisely what effect the customer would obtain for his money. The report ran that it was merely necessary to state the sum that one meant to spend, and, with the celerity of Aladdin's Lamp, Commercial Enterprise displayed one's

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future dwelling. Keith meant to spend much more than he could afford—he had felt that to be reasonable in the preparation of Betty's home would be an act of barbarity. The painter's profession makes erratic accountants; the artist who, by a lucky chance, sells a month's work for a hundred guineas is liable to say, "That means nearly thirteen hundred a year," and to live up to it till the writs come in. Three hundred pounds Keith meant to spend; and Betty—to whom it was something in the nature of a revelation that this didn't imply an absence of carpets—protested valiantly that it was "too much." They took a cab to the establishment.

The amount sounded less important to him when he mentioned it amid the splendours of the showroom, but the gentleman who received them heard it with respectful interest, and accompanied them part of their way. Their future residence, they learnt, was upstairs; a lift would bear them to its door.

The door stood hospitably ajar; there was no need for them to try whether the antique bell-pull would pull a bell. They entered, smiling, and stole through the tiny hall. Beyond the mimic casements they had glimpses of a canvas garden. No maid was manifest, but their abode stood

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ready for their coming. Flowers gave them welcome from a table; books invited from a Sheraton recess beside the hearth.

They discovered the Best Bedroom. He saw her open with her own hands the wardrobe where she was to hang her sacred things. On the dummy window the morning sun shone bright, and he pictured it shining on her face between those draperies when she woke. Growing bold in domesticity, they chose their pet corners in the drawing-room. "Could you be satisfied here, darling?" he whispered; and she nodded surely. "You shall have that chair, Dickie, and this one shall be mine." She sat. "It's good to be at home, my husband!" she laughed. And in the cardboard house he bent and kissed her.

They viewed the room where they would sup, where champagne should celebrate the triumph of a picture, and where the queen, in the rose peignoir, should be pampered when tired. And then, just as they were remembering that there were preliminaries to be performed, there appeared on the enchanted scene a young and winning hostess.

Under the lady's graceful guidance they inspected more practically. She hinted that the "leaded panes" which gave on to the painted

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garden would be "extras" if imitated in Sibella Road. There were one or two such trifling disillusions. For instance, Keith had taken a fancy to the antique brass fire-irons and electric fittings in the room, and those were not included in the three hundred pounds either. But the charming hostess reminded him that there were probably some other articles here that he would not need at all, and if that were so, the antique brass could be had instead. She seemed to take as kind an interest in the happy pair as if she had made up the match, and Betty said afterwards that, dainty as the House on the Landing was, its young hostess was the most delightful thing that it contained.

It was much simpler to furnish than to find two servants. The capital cook and accomplished house-parlour-maid who advertised for employment at such moderate wages had always taken a situation on the day that Betty wrote to the address that was given. And the address always proved to be a registry office, where a booking fee failed to disclose any domestic comparable with the treasures that had simultaneously vanished. But even two servants were obtained at last, and the evening came when the love scene in the cardboard house was re-enacted in Sibella Road. Mr. and Mrs. Keith were at home.

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It was beautiful, next morning, to send him upstairs to the studio after breakfast and kiss him for luck. He had told her that he expected her to come in there as often as she liked, but she was much too clever to have the illusion that frequent visits would make for progress, and she intended that his work-hours should be respected. After she had sat by the window, glancing at the newspaper—which was so stingy with its news of America—it occurred to her to put a few touches to the little drawing-room. Its aspect would be improved by some more cushions and flowers, and the piano needed draping. To buy some of the things before Keith came down would pass the time! She wondered if there were any good shops close by, and rang on impulse for her hat and shoes.

It disconcerted her that the ring evoked a frowsy and forbidding cook, who said shortly, "Good-mornin', ma'am. Shall I take the horders?"

Betty caught her breath. To her the comic element of the surprise was lacking. The moment was no less grave to the girl than to the man confronting his work overhead. She knew that it was a crisis; that, underlying the petty shock, was the test of her fitness to be his wife—and her hopeless inexperience frightened her. But it was

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Lynch's daughter who, on the brink of disaster, answered, "Yes, please, cook, I have got to see you now." And it was said very well; so far the cook hadn't found her out.

"What about lunch and dinner 'm?"

Excepting in a restaurant, she had never ordered a meal in her life.

"We don't want anything elaborate," she said; "we live very simply."

"Yes 'm."

"We shall want some hors-d'œuvres, and a little consommé, and—and some suprême de sole——"

"Some what of sole?" asked the woman, bridling. "What might it all be in Henglish 'm? I was given to understand as it was plain cooking you required."

"Yes," murmured Betty. "Give us a little caviare, or a few anchovies, and some soup. And we shall want some fish, and so on."

"How much?"

"Oh, I don't wish for any waste—say, one portion between two," said Betty laudably, and realised that she had blundered by the stare.

Here was meanness! And with a dress like that on her back! "One portion between the two?" stammered the cook, agape.

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"Well, you get what you think right." It was distressingly new to her to be timid of a servant.

"You'll leave the quantities to me, ma'am?" She smirked. Not meanness after all—only idiocy! She viewed her harvest. "And will you want a joint?"

"No. We might have a few sweetbreads, and a little poultry, and—well, yes, I suppose Mr. Keith would like some meat. Lamb."

The harvest demanded labour; the smirk subsided. "And—er—vegetables?"

"Why, yes," said Betty, "of course!"

"I meant, what are they to be 'm?"

She sighed. "Well, green peas and beans," she said.

"Both of 'em?"

"Well, one or the other."

"No potatoes 'm?"

"Oh, of course, I want potatoes," gasped Betty; "do you think I dine without potatoes?"

The woman sniffed. "What about sweets?" she asked, with umbrage.

"You can make us a macédoine."

"A what?" The tone was grim.

"What do you suggest?" inquired the mistress feebly.

"Would you like a nice rice pudden, or a happle pie?"

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"I think we will have meringues."

"Meringues? Of course, then, you'll horder 'em when you go hout? *Hi* couldn't undertake 'em."

"You will send your fellow-servant. And you will send up some strawberries and pears, please."

"There's no pears in."

"I don't want them till the evening; there is plenty of time to get them in before dinner."

"They ain't 'in,'" explained the woman curtly, "ain't in season."

Were there seasons to be considered? Were there such servants to be endured? Nothing comic for the girl, indeed! It was painful, piteous, worse—immeasurably worse, than the studio on one of the days when the hand was but a brush-holder and refused to "speak."

And there was luncheon to be arranged; and the knowledge that, with the morrow, the duty would recur. She had no wish to go and buy flowers, when the door closed behind a complaint about the kitchen range.

She sat back, and looked at the room with other eyes. Beyond it she saw the palace in Fifth Avenue, and the mansion that was called a "cottage" in Newport. For the first time she paid a tribute to the silence of their domestic

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machinery. Now that she came to think about it, it was surprising how everything had arranged itself!

In the early afternoon, a headlong rush of rattling traffic, followed by the clatter and crash of cans, shook her from her chair, dismayed. She found that small quantities of milk, from various dairies, were being taken to some of the doors. The violence raged from two o'clock till three, and she wondered at the strange land where a pennyworth of milk was delivered with the frenzy of a revolution.

Later, she and Keith went for a walk. St. John's Wood did not prove to be a very exhilarating quarter, and the sad Wellington Road offered few attractions as a promenade. She felt no enthusiasm when he mentioned that they might drop in to Lord's and watch the cricket sometimes. Though he had trembled in thinking that the rooms were not large enough for her, that the furniture was not good enough, his misgivings hadn't comprised the thought that she might be dejected by the housekeeping, and he attributed her depression to the hours that she had passed alone. He suggested that she should subscribe to Mudie's on the morrow, and reminded her that he knew one or two men in the

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neighbourhood whose wives would be glad of her friendship.

On their return, she changed her frock, and Keith, who had not guessed that she was going to do so, looked rather slovenly beside her smartness when he hooked it. But it was too late to repair his omission now.

The evening meal was indifferently cooked, and it was abominably served. The maid, who had been merely awkward during the brief luncheon, lost her wits among the unaccustomed courses of dinner. The wife had entered wistful for a few words of praise, but soon she yearned only for the ordeal to conclude.

The salt had not been smoothed. Bread, in the monstrosity of a cottage loaf, had been set at a corner of the table, and, in the process of cutting it, there were shot across the cloth enough crumbs for a chicken-run. A spot from the luncheon's gravy proclaimed that the cloth had done previous service; the napkins were tumbled.

"I thought they would know enough to put on others," she exclaimed penitently.

"These are all right, aren't they?" he said, surprised.

She kept her eyes down. "Well, yes," she faltered, "I suppose they'll do." She wouldn't

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let him see it, but it startled her to learn that he didn't expect clean napery at every meal.

There were intervals that threatened to be endless, followed by cascades of cutlery, as the flustered servant, in her creaking boots, bustled back with the knives and forks that had been forgotten. She popped the vegetable dishes in front of Betty, and when she was instructed to hand them, breathed heavily on the wrong side.

"It's an awful change for you, dear," said Keith, during one of the excited colloquies in the kitchen.

She struggled for a smile. "Oh, it's nothing!"

But the tension was greater for her than he divined, sorry and shamefaced as he was. She could have dined happily on bread-and-butter in a clean field; this vulgar racket set her nerves quivering.

"I expect it's my own fault; I've given them too much to do," she murmured, with dry lips. "Perhaps it would be better if we had just one or two things in future?"

"Well, I don't think we need be quite so extensive, certainly," he agreed. He had been thinking that they could not afford it, and unconsciously the thought was in his voice.

Misery gripped her throat. She stared dumbly

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through the open window into the back yard. The toilette that she made weighed on her—she felt ridiculous to be well dressed. Her husband had sat down in a tweed jacket, the table linen was soiled, the servants were unspeakable, it was all revolting—and he hinted to her that it was extravagance!

Years of her life she would have given at that instant to be alone, to be free to scream unheard. Down her arms, to her very finger-tips, hysteria was clamouring in her.

The relief was physical when she rose at last; but though she hurried to her room, she dared not scream. She clenched her hands and beat them hard against the wall instead.

She could not stay away long.

Dusk was gathering when she descended. In the half-light the little drawing-room had a melancholy air. Farther down Sibella Road an ancient toper, with a harp, was quavering:

> "My mother is with the Hangels now,
> She is waiting for me there!"

The feet of the servant pounded along the passage. The clatter from the kitchen continued to be maddening. A lugubrious church-clock droned a quarter past eight. She recognised that there were nearly two hours to be borne before she could credibly assert that she was tired.

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CHAPTER IX

SHE went to bed faint with the fear of the morrow. Like a shy child away from home and yearning to be "fetched"—like a prisoner the first time that a sentence of years knells on his consciousness—she shrank from the terrors of the life before her. Of course, the servants were exceptionally bad for the wages that they were receiving; of course it is not usual for even a second-class servant to put a loaf on a dinner-table; and of course that first full day was the most poignant of all. But if her husband had not been dearer to her than the man with whom she fell in love, she would have broken down before a week. Not for a single week could she have stood the strain. Whatever the consequences, she must have owned herself incapable.

Besides, if he really understood how wretched she was, she could not doubt that he would yield and consent to her father's providing for them. It was not the dread of a refusal that tied her tongue, nor was it the shame of confessing herself a failure—it was her reluctance to pain him,

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to stab him by admitting that all his efforts for her happiness were so futile that she could not support the change even for a week. She felt that it would be a cruel thing to do.

"If he really understood!" Sometimes she wondered if she could have made him understand, if she could have made anybody understand whom usage had dulled to the life's unrest. He and others would say, "Oh, naturally you don't like being poor; you miss your big house, and your carriage, and your French cook!" But it wasn't that the villa was little, though the walls' nearness to one another pent her in moments; it wasn't that she walked to St. John's Wood Road Station, instead of having carriages and motor cars at her command; it wasn't that her food was cooked by an incompetent slattern, instead of by a famous chef. It was the vulgarity pertaining to small means that crushed her. "What about the kitchen coal 'm?" "The butcher hasn't called for orders 'm!" "We're out of hale 'm, and the shops are shut!" There were women in all the villas of the street; she saw some of them pass the window. They looked complacent, and she envied them. Did they realise the ceaseless preparation behind their curtains? Did they know that a house where one was for ever arranging never became a home?

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Within, there was not, during the day, one hour when she could claim peace and feel safe against intrusion. There was not, during the day, one meal when the sight of the table didn't jar upon her, though she could have eaten the cold beef with contentment. The service, and the bathroom!—she had not dreamed till now that it could be nauseous to bathe. The continuous preparation for what was sickening when it came! And the doors that banged, banged, banged, until every pulse in her was expectant of the next slam!

Several pressing invitations had reached them from Clapham Park, and once they had paid a duty visit, but they had always excused themselves from dining there. Lady Keith had, moreover, called at the villa, and attempted gingerly to condole with Betty on "dear Richard's eccentricities." The girl read her like a tale in words of one syllable, and the lady could only gather, to her consternation, that his wife cordially endorsed his views.

Returning good for evil, she introduced the subject of housekeeping, and was dismayed to learn that nothing here was locked beyond the servants' maw. What an establishment from A to Z!

"Oh, my dear, but you ought to have every-

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thing under lock and key!" she sighed. "My cook comes to me at half-past nine every morning with a trayful of cups, and I measure out just what is needed for the next twenty-four hours—so much tea, and so much sugar, and so much rice, and so forth." She had picked up "so forth" from the knight. "I think it is our duty to keep temptation out of our servants' way and discourage waste. I look forward to my tray!"

"*I'd* rather be dead," said Betty carelessly.

It was a shocking sentiment—but the speaker might have revelled in millions! There was nothing to be gained from her—even if Richard had apostatised, their wealth would have yielded not a sovereign to the coffers of Clapham Park; yet the mere thought of the millions exalted her to a pinnacle, and "Aunt Emily" had only simpered her dissent.

The girl had not written to her father or brother since her marriage; her father's cablegram rankled in her memory, and Howard had not shown enough interest in the matter to wish her happiness. To Mrs. Waldehast, however, she had written gaily hitherto; now she found it difficult to write, though as a rule even formal correspondence was no effort to her. There had been occasion for Keith to communicate with the landlord, and Betty, the butterfly, had

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suggested phrases that sounded as businesslike as if they had come out of East India Avenue. Her letter from Sibella Road to her friend was accomplished only after she had wasted a good deal of the new stationery. Her first attempts had been very much out of tune, and "I am perfectly happy," added as an improvement, seemed only to call attention to the flatness of what came before. She was thankful when she finished at last; the thought of the mail would be no pleasure to her in future, nor was she sorry that the Waldehasts' intended trip to Europe had been postponed.

Though she was at pains to affect good spirits when Keith was present, he was distressfully conscious of a change in her; and the women whose complacence she envied, envied the woman whose housemaid "was always whistling on the doorstep for cabs in the evening." He examined the rooms, trying to conjecture what deficiency must mean the greatest hardship to her. Her toilet-service looked very meagre, and he determined to surprise her with a better one. He was surprised himself to learn the prices, but paid ten pounds for little silver pots and bottles, delighted with his inspiration.

"You won't feel such a pauper when you go to your dressing-table now!" he crowed as she

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unpacked the parcel. The toilet-service that she had left on her table in New York had been acquired in the rue Drouot for seventy-five thousand francs, and had once belonged to the Empress Joséphine.

"You angel! Aren't they sweet? I *am* proud of them!" she exclaimed. But she felt poorer than before, because the tenderness of his error made the gift pathetic to her.

How could she say to this man, "I am miserable"? When he questioned her, she vowed that there was nothing the matter.

For a long while he had had elusive visions of a picture which had named itself in his mind, "The Harbour of Souls." He saw the misty forms of frail craft floating out of shadow into the whiteness of dawn. Some of the craft had been storm-tossed on the way. Age and youth were among the vague figures; a girl had sunk under torn sails, but her gaze was calm now. Over all was silence. The light, the still water, the faces, all meant peace.

The mental impression attracted him powerfully, but the whole scheme remained indefinite because his recent expenses had reduced his capital so much that he feared to begin the sketches for the picture. He knew very well that, if he did so, he would crave to work on it

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exclusively, and he could not afford the indulgence. Instead, he worked on a canvas that he had blocked in roughly in America; and he sold two smaller studies that he had brought back; he sold them to Vivard, the dealer, a cad in the clothes of a gentleman. It had once happened that an unfamiliar artist, intruding into the sanctity of Vivard's, had been mistaken for a customer—and the artist had never forgotten his experience of Vivard's two manners.

Betty had dimly supposed that painters sent nearly all their pictures in cabs to the Academy, or that Vivard, or Kluht, or one of those people, came to the studios and made respectful offers; to see Keith prepare to go forth with two canvases for sale under his arm had been not a little startling. But here, the American spirit in her made her dauntless; she was no snob. While the managing clerk's wife across the way sneered at "such a common business," the multi-millionaire's daughter went to the gate with her husband and wished him luck.

One afternoon, when they had been in Sibella Road between two and three weeks, the servant came to the studio to tell Keith that her mistress was not at home, and that a gentleman was asking for them.

"What name did he give?"

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"He told me to say it was Mrs. Keith's father, sir."

Keith started; no visitor could have been less welcome. "Oh!" he said. "All right. Is he in the drawing-room?"

"No, sir; I left 'im in the 'all."

"Well, show him into the drawing-room, and say I'll be with him in a few minutes."

Lynch settled himself on the six-pound settee leisurely, drawing deductions. On the whole, his girl's room was not so bad as he had dreaded, —the aspect of the street had foretokened something meaner,—but it was piteous and impossible. He rejoiced that he had come—she might have been too proud to own her mistake for months. As to this husband of hers, he was doubtless kicking himself for his heroics by now, even assuming that they were more than a manœuvre at the start. In Betty's interests, though, one must affect to be fooled by him. It would have been refreshing to hear that he had met with an accident and been killed.

Keith came in. "Mr. Lynch? I am sorry my wife is out." He did not offer his hand.

"Well, Mr. Keith! I am glad to meet you. I have neglected some business to do so."

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you. Is Betty well?"

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"Yes, thanks. I expect she'll be back before very long."

They regarded each other curiously—the swindler trying to see into the mind of his son-in-law; his son-in-law loathing the necessity for receiving the swindler with politeness.

"Mr. Keith, you and I have got to have quite a chat; I guess we have got to arrive at a friendly understanding."

"Do you think it's essential for us to introduce any painful subject?" asked Keith nervously.

"I shall make a blunt answer to that: if Betty was not married to you, it would not concern me to correct your prejudices. But my daughter cannot continue to be dependent on her husband's professional earnings—we are not playing opera-bouffe. I have too much affection for my child to let her suffer rather than put myself in a humiliating position. I will only ask you to make it as little humiliating to me as your views permit—I am an old man, and a more sensitive one than I allow my enemies to believe."

Involuntarily Keith liked him better. "My own wish would be to avoid the position altogether," he said gently.

"I appreciate your meaning. But my girl is dear to you too; for her sake you will see that

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it is our duty not to spare ourselves. You have a very remarkable character, Mr. Keith; I have the very highest admiration for your principles; but—I shall be candid—I have no admiration for your financial judgment. You have shown me that it is too impulsive."

"How?"

"By forming a decision before you had an opportunity to investigate the system that you have condemned. You let yourself be carried away by the side that shouted, and you forgot that it might be the silent side that was right. Now I am going to say to you what it don't interest me to say to any other of my critics: my enterprises are open to your inspection, Mr. Keith—ask me any questions you please, and I will answer them."

"You pay me a great compliment," said Keith drily, "but, as you may be aware, I am not qualified to examine you on financial matters, even if I wished to do it."

"Should not examination precede the verdict?"

"Mr. Lynch, the examination has been made by experts, and the verdict returned by the world."

The heroics were genuine, the man meant it! If Betty had only stood firm! But she had given

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him full swing, so he had to be conciliated. There was hatred in Lynch's heart, and good-humour in his smile.

"Has experience in your own line convinced you that the world's verdict is always sound? I guess I have heard of great artists much misapprehended by the world?"

Keith found no reply.

"Come, Mr. Keith, I want you to see it my way! Put these difficulties of yours before me, and I will meet them squarely—and not entirely for Betty's sake now; I like your grit. You haven't cool brains, but you have something more wonderful; I should be proud to shake your hand before I go, and you have got to do me justice before that can happen. See here, Betty's husband has got to be right on top! I hear you are a genius—and everybody has got to recognise it. I don't know much about your profession, but I know something about life. I presume that the artist who can take a big house and entertain big people will get there considerably sooner than the artist who has no dollars to speak for him. I aim at seeing you President of the Royal Academy. What is there between us? There always have been, and there always must be, a few very rich men; and there always have been, and there always must be, many more

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very poor ones. To abuse a millionaire because there are bankrupts on the earth is as unreasonable as to sling mud at Niagara because there are droughts."

"Nobody but an anarchist, or some other sort of lunatic, would abuse a man merely for being a millionaire, or a multi-millionaire. One reviles methods, not millions."

"Well, let us get down to business! Between you and I there can be a perfect frankness. What are the methods that are worrying you?"

"I'd rather not go into details—to Betty's father, and in my own house."

"It's just strait-laced square dealing that you quit talking generalities and specify your objections."

"Well, then, I object to a fortune amassed by refusing poorer men the power to live. I find the methods of such a Trust as yours, sir, as devoid of Christianity, and patriotism, and sympathy as the methods of the primeval ages, when Might was Right. And I object to a fortune amassed by plunder, by wholesale trickery, and perjury, and corruption; by bribing a Press to spread lies broadcast for the snare of the life-earnings of thousands, and the inquitous enrichment of a few millionaires who have already more millions than they can spend

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—lies of enormous finds in mines that are worthless, and of enormous profits from shares that are being given a fictitious value by bogus transactions. I object to a fortune that creates defaulters, and suicides, and prostitutes—and I object to my wife battening on them!"

He had said it, although his voice had shaken and his pulses had thumped; and though he was too unnerved now to look at Lynch, he was glad that it was said. Behind Lynch's impassive features fury was blazing; and behind the fury was one poignant, pure regret: "That's how he speaks of me to my girl!"

It was not a moment when he could afford fury—the moment demanded prompt, grave, and whole-hearted lying.

"You would be quite right to object," he said smoothly. "So would any honest man! But why accept this poppycock without investigation? You repeat the charge that I bribe a section of the Press to spread lies for the snare of investors. Mr. Keith, that charge is itself a lie which a section of the Press was bribed to spread. It was the other side of the game!" He smiled wistfully. Richard, meeting his gaze, confused, found it deep with reproachful sorrow. If a stranger had entered the room, he would have taken the accuser for a culprit, and the scoundrel

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for a benefactor whose confidence had been betrayed. "Might is not necessarily Right? No, sir. But do not imagine that Noise is necessarily Truth. A man cannot make millions without making enemies too. I do not say I am a philanthropist, I shall not pretend to you for a single instant that my notions are as lofty as all your own—the world has been too rough on me for me to have a wholesale tenderness for the world. You have spoken of 'patriotism.' W-e-ll, I am a naturalised American citizen; but I was born in this wet little island, and as a poor boy I found England no more interesed in my miseries than I afterwards found America. When I went without shoes, the stones of Lancashire were no gentler to my feet because I trod my native land. When I had empty pockets, the British storekeepers were no more benevolent than the aliens. If I had died of starvation on the street, my death would have caused no more concern to England than to any other country. I do not know what 'patriotism' means; I do not allow that any callous parent is entitled to affection. Tenderness deserves tenderness, but I cannot understand why an outcast should feel more sentimental about the soil of the land he was born in than about the planks of the ship if he was born in mid-ocean. You have spoken of

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'sympathy.' I have seen no results from it. If you expect advancement from sympathy, I warn you that you are putting your hopes into rotten stock. Sympathy is the emotion that accomplishes nothing. Ambition, love, hate, jealousy, greed, they all hustle, and make history; sympathy loafs, and makes phrases. It is the weakling of the emotional group. I say these things because I wish to be sincere with you; I do not propose to claim any virtues that I do not possess. But, Mr. Keith, I do claim, and I have the right to claim, that throughout my career I have never committed a dishonourable act, never wronged man, woman or child. I will illustrate; I will show you what I mean by the 'other side of the game.' You shall see how a man who has treated his friends and his business associates with the utmost generosity may be attacked by some of the men who he has served most, and how these very indictments, that arouse indignation against him, are hatched simply to divert the public's dollars into schemes more lucrative to the organisers."

With a patience that was marvellous he led Keith, step by step, through transactions of magnitude—translating, descanting, yet talking with so much tact that he instructed a novice with the air of confiding to a mind as astute as

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his own. "Till you can crush your opponent, flatter him!" had been one of the maxims of his life. He had matched his wits against some of the keenest financial intellects of the world, and emerged triumphant; but, in its way, as clever a thing as he had ever done was the task of the next hour, while, without a trace of weariness, he reduced the intricacies of Wall Street operations to terms intelligible to a schoolboy, and simultaneously invented conspiracies and figures to prove his falsehoods.

And at the end, Keith looked him in the eyes and said, "My wife does not touch a shilling of such money, as God hears!"

The average man's self-control would have snapped. Lynch desired a conversation with Betty before she had been prepared for it; to take offence would mean to take leave and give her husband an opportunity to coach her. He indulged in the faintest shrug.

"We are told, 'The truth is mighty, and will prevail,'" he said pleasantly, "but there is no clause *re* time-limit. I will illustrate further."

Only when she had come in and they were left together did he permit himself the luxury of vehemence. He read her mind in her first evasion, and wrath and protest poured from him as he paced the room. But she would not

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acknowledge that she was dissatisfied. She spoke of Keith's devotion. She gave instances of his tenderness. She boasted that she had never known what it meant to ask him for money, or to have an empty purse. And at the back of her brain all the while was the longing for him to yield, the regret at hearing that he had been firm.

"Betty," said Lynch, "I have been proud of you—don't make me think you a fool, honey. I've got a fool for a son—leave me my daughter! Have I been so harsh to you that you should punish me this way? Can't you feel what it'll mean to me to leave you in a house like this? I can't stand it. I guess a father has got rights too. *I* loved you when you were a baby, *I've* been tender to you all your life; what has this man done, who comes around when you're a woman, to wipe me out in your affections? You ain't fair with me. I can't do anything if you're dogged—it's waste of time my making a settlement if you won't spend the money. It's right here that you have got to put this thing through! Handle it while his love's fresh. See here, women kick up a rumpus about men having too much power, but I tell you this, with a lifetime of experience behind me—there's no power on earth like a pretty woman's. Only she's like a

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horse—she don't know her own strength, or no man could boss her. What you've got to do is to tell him that it don't suit you to play at being crazy any longer. The bigger his love, the safer your position! He'll climb down."

"I promised him," she reiterated, "I promised him before we were married. Please don't say any more. It's no good. I can't do it."

"W-e-ll, I am beaten! I came for nothing. I guess I'll go back by the next boat. Shall I see you again? Will you come and stay with me till I sail?"

"I'll come, of course, but I won't stay."

"Why not?"

"I think we understand all each other's reasons, poppa," said Betty, smiling crookedly. "If I went to stay with you, it wouldn't make this look much better to me afterwards, eh?"

His purpose was detected—but it was his own daughter who had seen through him; Lynch sighed—but patted her hand with approval.

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CHAPTER X

No, she wouldn't stay at the hotel, but the waiters and the table appointments were not without an influence when she lunched or dined there; nor was Lynch the person to accept defeat so easily as he had pretended.

He harped no more on his own feelings, nor on her privations; he questioned her about Keith's work: and she had never liked her father so well as while he listened to her rhapsodies, with an assumption of growing interest, and made generous remarks about the man who, she gathered, had abused him. "The Harbour of Souls," she declared, would be a great picture one day—by far the most important thing that Richard had ever done—but the day was distant; naturally, he had other things to do in the meantime. It was to this that Lynch had been guiding her. Wealth, he exclaimed, would have absolved her husband from the need for doing the "other things"—wealth would have given his genius full play. As it was—well, of course, marriage was bound to handicap him; he could

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not hope to be famous so young as if he hadn't a wife to support! Even the luncheons and dinners provided opportunities, though they fell short of the temptations projected.

Betty was much too acute to miss the motive for such regrets—she realised, directly they were uttered, that she had been adroitly led to a desired cue—but, for all that, there was sufficient truth in the words for them to stick.

Though Keith did his best to disguise aversion, the sight of her going forth to visit her father every day was far from being pleasant. He was infinitely relieved one evening, when she had come back, to hear that the date for Lynch's departure was fixed.

"I suppose you're not sorry to hear it?" she said. There was a new umbrage in her tone.

"Have I made any complaint about your going?" he returned, startled.

"I haven't noticed much enthusiasm."

"You can hardly expect me to be 'enthusiastic.' I shouldn't be enthusiastic about your being out all day, wherever you went."

She drummed her fingers on the mantelshelf: "If my father came here, I shouldn't have to go to him so often."

"The house is open to him, Betty."

"Well, I should hope so!—if he chose to come

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to it after the way you received him," she said.

It was the first hint of dissension. He took a turn about the room—and put an arm round her.

"I've been afraid of this—don't let it happen!"

Her figure was not responsive.

"I told you the same night that I was sorry I had said so much. But it had to be then, or not at all."

"It might have been 'not at all.'"

"It isn't easy to refuse to let a man do things for his own child and to hold back your reason for it. You told me you understood?" His caress tightened. "You aren't going to be angry with me?"

She uttered a little choky cry and clutched at him. "We might have been so comfortable!" she quavered.

His heart seemed to stand still. He had failed, then! The drawing-room that he had thought rather luxurious looked pathetically stupid across her shoulder. There was a long pause.

She wished he would speak. She wished she hadn't said it. "Oh, Dick!"

"I didn't know," said Keith drearily. "I—yes, I've wondered."

"It's nothing. I didn't mean to tell you; I

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meant to tell you about something quite different! But—— Oh, you think me such a sneak, don't you, after I promised?"

"I want you to tell me the truth always. Has it—have you been uncomfortable long?"

"It's so hard!"

"I mean, is it only since he came over? I don't want to deceive myself, but has it been so hard all the time?"

"Not at first—I mean, not till we were here. Don't think *that,* oh no!"

"It's this, the house? You—oh, don't tremble, don't be afraid! Whom should you speak to, if not *me?* aren't we one? Why, I want to hear your troubles; it brings me closer to you to hear your troubles than your pleasures. Tell me everything, just as if you were thinking aloud."

"It's because I'm a fool. I don't know how to manage—and the servants see it. They're awful. They make it worse for me. I think of them when I wake up, the first thing. Dick, they're spoiling our home to me! I'm afraid of them."

He strangled an oath. "Afraid of them? I'll pitch them out of the house neck and crop to-morrow morning! I'd send them off to-night if it weren't too late. Why didn't you say so? why

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didn't you come to me about it? My poor little girl!"

"The new ones'd be just the same. I daresay they don't mean any harm—it's my own fault; I don't understand." She clung to him tearfully. "Dickie, duckie, you know I loathe going back on what I said, but don't you think we might let poppa do a little for us—just a little? I don't ask you to take much—I know you'd feel too bad about it—but if we had just a few thousand pounds a year, it'd make everything so different. It would all be lovely then! It isn't only me—there's you too; you'd get on so much faster. You could start on your picture right away. If we go on like this, I know very well that by-and-by you'll be sorry you cared for me. You can't succeed so soon as if you weren't married. I want to be of use to you, I want to be a chum; I can't be a chum if I'm a burden, and it makes me feel miserable, knowing I could do so much if you'd only let me. It humiliates me to think I'm a drawback to my husband—I never thought I'd be that! Poppa likes you; he admires you for your pluck in standing up to him, though he says your ideas about it are quite wrong. If you'd only say 'Yes,' I could tell him in the morning, and he could fix it up before he goes. Think what it would be! All of a sudden! In

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five minutes all the horrors would be over—all our life would be just as beautiful as our honeymoon! Just a little, Dickie—what is it out of all the millions? Couldn't we take just enough to make things smooth?"

It was one of the moments when man strives, speechless and voiceless, for words to utter his very soul. What could he answer that would make him seem less than brutal to her?

"I'd do anything else on earth for you," he stammered—and execrated his own triteness.

To her the blow was as heavy as to him. He wasn't going to yield! She had not realised till now how it had supported her to believe that the remedy was within her reach; she had not meant to take it, she had only glanced at it sometimes for encouragement. All at once it had vanished—the future was bare. It was to go on like this for years and years! What he was saying came to her muffled.

"Don't you see that it doesn't matter whether we take much or little?" he pleaded wretchedly. "It's not the amount that makes it right or wrong; if it were right of me to say 'Yes' to a little, it would be wrong of me to draw the line at all. Oh, Betty darling, you know the broken lives behind this money! You know what I say about it is true—you've told me that you know!

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For God's sake, don't ask me to hold you at a price like that!—it would degrade us, it would poison our love. Our marriage will never be a drawback to me if we play the game honestly —you *will* be a help, you *will* be a chum, just as you want to be. It's not you who've been a fool, it's I—I ought to be kicked for giving you housekeeping to do. I ought to have remembered. I hate myself for being such a blockhead!"

"Oh, nonsense," she said dismally.

"That's the only thing, isn't it? You say you were happy before? If it weren't for that, you wouldn't mind?"

She shook her head.

"Well, we'll give the house up! We'll take a flat where there's a restaurant downstairs. We ought to have done it at the beginning."

"As if I'd let you be so crazy, when we've only just come in!"

"It doesn't matter when we came in, I'm not going to have you made miserable if I can help it. Oh, kiddy, don't think me cruel to you. I know it sounds the cheapest thing in the world to say I'd do anything excepting what you ask, but I can't do that—I can't, I can't! I'll take you out of the house to-morrow; you shan't spend another day in it. We'll go to an hotel till we've found what we want—and we'll go to

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a nice one. Curse the servants! When I think what you've been going through while I was imagining I had done all I could to make you happy, I—— 'Afraid of them'!" Pain and rage mastered him. He flung to the electric button, and was sorry that it wasn't a bell-handle that he could wrench.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to give them notice!"

"They can't go now."

"I can give them notice now, though! What do you suppose I'm made of? Do you suppose I'm made of bricks-and-mortar, that I can bear to see you cry and have to look like a tyrant, and know that it all comes from those——?"

"Dick!" she said urgently, "Dick, don't! They've never been rude, never. Please! Don't make a fuss to-night!"

He sat down, trembling.

The housemaid opened the door: "Yes'm?"

"You've forgotten the syphon," said Betty.

"It's on the little table 'm."

"Oh, is it? I didn't notice. Very well."

She had no passion for money as the sententious knight, and his wife, who doled out the sugar, had a passion for it; she did not worship money for money's sake. Measured by the profusion that she had been taught to take for

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granted, her requirements had, indeed, been reduced to the point of heroism—she asked only for peace. The prospect of being relieved from the housekeeping had lightened her mood almost as much as if he had consented to her appeal. Laughter quivered in her voice now, though it was more than a shade hysterical.

"She little knows what I've saved her from!"

Keith could not laugh yet.

She knelt on a *pouf* beside him: "You'll make me sorry I told you."

"You aren't to say that! I'm thankful—I've never been more thankful for anything in my life. It isn't your telling me that upsets me, it's my own idiocy in needing to be told. You don't know how bitter it is to a man, when he loves a woman, to hear she has had a big trouble that he didn't see. Well, I'll try to make up to you for it! You won't have to think of the servants when you wake to-morrow, kiddy."

"You really mean it? I feel awful selfish. I do, I feel a monster!"

"Where's your face, monster? Don't keep it such a long way off."

"A flat will cost ever so much more, you know it will," she purred, nestling to him. "With a restaurant downstairs, it'll be perfectly ruinous to you. And where will you work?"

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"I'll work in my old studio—it's lucky I've still got it."

"That'll be two rents, then. Besides this one! We won't be able to get rid of it in a hurry, you may be sure. And think of the money it has cost —look at the windows, and the wall-papers. Oh, it's wicked!" She sprang up resolutely. "No, we can't do it. I mean it. I won't do it!" She was quite sincere, she didn't mean to do it.

"Of course the wall-papers must be considered before *you*," said Keith; "what else are wall-papers made for? Do you mind bringing that cheek back—I'm taking a chill. . . . Do you know—is that right, are you comfortable?—do you know, I'm not sorry to get out of this! I'm not, upon my word!" he went on, with rising spirits. "There's something rather depressing about it, I think—perhaps it's a gravel soil."

"What does that do?"

"I don't know exactly, but I know it isn't right. Or perhaps it's a clay soil that isn't right —I know when people take a house there's some sort of soil they don't want. A flat will be ever so much cosier—much better for me, too. I hate the tradesmen banging at the side door all the morning; and the woman opposite is such an object."

"She doesn't interfere with us, does she?"

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"I don't like her profile; it infuriates me. I'm glad we're going, for lots of reasons."

"*I'd* sing for joy, if I didn't feel so mean. Lucky thing for you I feel mean!"

"If you talk any more nonsense about feeling 'mean,' I'll shake you. Are you going to be good?"

"Mmps."

"Well, then, let's decide everything. Now I come to think of it—— Why do you always push my hair backwards?"

"I d'n' know—I like it. Don't be so vain! Well? Now you come to think of it?"

"Now I come to think of it, I believe flats of that kind are always let furnished. I'm not sure if you can get an unfurnished flat with catering."

"What's to become of our furniture, then?"

"We might give it to the servants, as a token of appreciation."

"No, but really?"

"Well, I suppose we'd better sell it. Tread on the carpet lightly and keep it new! By Jove, an auction 'll put us in funds again—we'll go out to dinner on the strength of it!"

"We *might* find an unfurnished flat, mightn't we?" said Betty.

"We might." He pondered. "But there'd

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be no use for the stair-carpets, anyhow. Nor the rods."

"No." She also reflected. "And the flat wouldn't be as big as the house—we couldn't get all the things into it."

"I hadn't thought of that. Well, it's all the more reason why we should sell them—it's no good storing them for years. Besides, when we take a house again, they'd be lost in it."

"Buckingham Palace?"

"No, it's too near the railway line—we'll want something select. We'll do it properly next time —servants that know their business. I hope the flat won't be too poky, though!"

"It can be as poky as it likes, we don't want to play hide-and-seek. It doesn't matter how small it is, if you have your studio outside. All we need is—— It oughtn't to cost so much more, after all, ought it?"

"I should think we could go West for about the same rent. If we only need a drawing-room and a bedroom——"

"It—it'll have to be more than that," she murmured.

"We shall take our meals in the restaurant, you know."

"Still we'll want a third room——"

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"For our luggage?"

"No." She slipped a little closer, and her eyes were hidden from him. "We'll want a third room, Dickie—for someone else by-and-by."

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CHAPTER XI

REALISING the vision in the cardboard house, the morning sun shone on her face between the draperies when she woke, but Keith was too busy packing to appreciate that gleam of irony.

"If we make haste, we can be out of the place and comfortably settled at the hotel before luncheon," he explained.

She contemplated the confusion with her arms round his neck. Among her charms was the one that no beauty specialist undertakes to restore with a "remarkable preparation"—the charm of waking up lovely.

"It looks as if it had been raining shirts," she pouted.

"You should have seen it five minutes ago!"

"Do you think we ought to rush it so, really? Don't you think if we went to-morrow instead——"

"I'll help you with your things; that's why I wanted to get mine done early. I hope I didn't make a noise? No, I don't want you to have another day here; I want to whisk you right out of

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it. Let's make a dash and get it over! I'll go round to the agent's directly after breakfast."

"Hark at my American husband! All right, we needn't take a heap—we can come back and finish?"

"*I* can. *You* take all your clothes now; you don't cross the door-mat again!" He returned to the litter, and wrestled with a portmanteau that wouldn't fasten. "Do you know, I've been thinking we had better let the servants stop, after all; if we leave the house empty, we'll have a burglary, and we aren't insured. I can give them notice, just the same, and tell them why!"

"If you give them notice, it's likely to be empty anyhow sometimes—they'll do as they please, with us away."

"That's true."

"I think it'd be best to part amiably with them, and let them imagine we're going for a few days; if they don't know when to expect us back, they'll have to be careful."

"Upon my word, they're triumphant to the last!" He threw the portmanteau viciously. "They're driving us out, and we've got to grin at them when we go. As a matter of fact, you know, I suppose there are things to be done in such cases, but it's a mystery how people learn them; there ought to be a book published on the

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subject, 'First Steps to Getting Even with your Servants.' . . . It's these boots that prevent my shutting it! It's a marvellous thing, I haven't got any clothes, and two trunks aren't big enough to hold them. Very well, just as you like. We'll take it smiling, and——"

"Battle with the baggage bravely!" she said. "Fix your gaze on the hotel, weary one—it'll be very restful and expensive."

It was a long while before the moment was reached, but when the last strap had been buckled, and the last "mate" had mopped his brow after lifting a bonnet-box, they recovered something of the honeymoon spirit, as they were rattled towards Kensington in a decrepit four-wheeler. And the hotel looked a haven of repose, as she had predicted; and Keith, who felt that his plan had been masterly and his execution brilliant, was a lively companion till he insisted on ringing for somebody to remove two prints from the bedroom walls.

"But they're by Landseer," expostulated Betty; "the people will think we're crazy."

"Let them think! Never be dazzled by names. These things aren't pictures, they're brutalities. Look at 'Waiting for the Deer to Rise.' Ruffians crouching to destroy a splendid animal! Is there anything beautiful in that? We won't ask if it's

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'ennobling,' but is there a gleam of beauty in it? Now look at 'How to get the Deer Home'; that's worse art still. The composition is all subordinated to the tortured face of the animal in its death agonies. The subjects are revolting. An artist would never have touched them."

"Yes," she said, "I see it now. I hadn't thought of it like that."

So the prints in their maple frames were banished, and the hotel manager was much diverted privately by "these visitors' ignorance, in objecting to pictures which, if they had only noticed it, were by Landseer!"

They gave themselves a short holiday. Then they went out to conquer, and came back to quail. In the morning they discovered that they could not "go West for about the same rent"; and in the afternoon they learnt that they could not go to Clement's Inn either, nor even to Maida Vale. By the following night they had serious doubts whether they would be able to go anywhere, for every microscopic and exorbitant flat that they viewed addressed itself to bachelors only. The quest extended to strange districts, and it was revealed to the innocents that the modern landlord, with a house that would be difficult to let at a hundred a year, calls

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each of its stories a "flat," and lets it at three hundred and fifty instead.

"The dazzle of the name," said Keith, "there we have it again! Shakespeare didn't say 'What's in a name?' as a writing-man, he saw the value of a name thoroughly. The bosh was Juliet's, who saw nothing but Romeo."

"Oh, don't improve the occasion," said Betty, "my shoes are pinching. It seems to me we might as well ask for a brace of dodos. By rights, we ought to give the idea up."

He knew that as well as she. If they had been practical they would have searched for better servants, and returned to Sibella Road. But he loved her—marriage had deepened the man's feelings, too—so he only put her into a cab, and said, "Well, after all, in a flat there are no rates and taxes to pay!"

It is a fatal phrase.

And there was the determining influence of the "party." Scarcely a fortnight had gone by when the agent in St. John's Wood wrote that the villa could be sub-let to a "party" who was not unwilling to acquire all the new furniture for considerably less than it had cost.

"It seems too lucky to be true!" cried Betty joyously.

It wasn't.

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Opulent from the sale of the furniture, Keith heard flat rents with fortitude.

They succumbed to Telemachus Mansions.

Telemachus Mansions were squeezed into a back street near the hotel, and were accordingly boastful of being Kensington. They boasted also that the tenants "enjoyed the benefits pertaining to a perfectly appointed home, without the vexations of housekeeping." The rooms had not been constructed to hold many things, but that was all the better for the bank balance; nor was there a restaurant, as expected; but "meals prepared under the personal superintendence of a skilled chef, and served in the residents' own suites," sounded even pleasanter. There were a liveried porter, and a languid lift. The rent was a hundred and fifty pounds per annum; the weekly charge for domestic service, a half-guinea per head; and the cheapest meal, a half-crown per mouth—excepting a cup of tea, with bread-and-butter, in the afternoon, which was offered recklessly for ninepence.

They moved in towards the close of September, and their first evening in the Mansions was less romantic than their first evening in the villa. It had not been thrilling to Keith to see her open a wardrobe in a shop this time. On the contrary, the whole experience had been very tiring, and

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it seemed to him that his work had been at a standstill ever since his marriage. Nevertheless, they were cheerful enough, though the dinner of the "personal superintendence" was tepid, and a fire would have been more exhilarating than a stove ornament.

At nine o'clock next morning he strode out to the studio near the Foundling, and she was not to expect him back till dusk. Never had a woman sworn more loyally to see only the bright side of things. She played the piano and chose her liveliest music to help her to feel that she was in high spirits. She gazed out of the narrow window, and tried to believe that the mean view was interesting. After the Swiss youth brought in a lukewarm luncheon, she flavoured it by dwelling on the luncheons in Sibella Road. When tedium drove her out into a drizzle, she reminded herself that the walk wasn't aimless, because there was a ton of coal to be ordered. Her intentions were excellent.

And time, and acquaintances, helped her. Hitherto she had met but few of her husband's friends, and seen nothing of the women who, he had once told her, arrived with their babies and put them to sleep on the host's bed. Now the social circle began to widen. There were painters—a good many painters—and an author or

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two, and an actor and his wife. On the whole, an interesting set, as their different languages became intelligible to her. In October the actor's wife was jubilant because "Peter"—whose Christian name on the programmes was "Pelham"—had been engaged to support Cornelia Warwick in *Fédora*. And in November she was angry with him because he had been dismissed. She explained the incident one evening at a gathering in Chelsea.

"He used to dig his knuckles into her skinny chest and batter her on the sofa till she came off crying every night. She showed him her bruises and begged him to take care. 'Realistic scene,' he said; 'can't spoil it!' The woman was black and blue—of course she gave him his notice."

"How unintelligent of her," murmured Tracey Wynne. "More earnestness is what we need in our actors. On the stage, artistic ideals——"

"Artistic ideals anywhere are like measles—if you don't get them over while you're young, you're likely to find them serious," interrupted a journalist. "The road to Rowton House is paved with artistic ideals."

"I don't want to turn your head, but sometimes I read you," said Keith; "and you wrote

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lately that we had 'too many idealists, and too few ideals.' "

"My dear fellow, a journalist's daily necessity for making new comments on old subjects forces many a clever man to write stupid things."

"Well, he ought to suffer for them," said Wynne.

"So he does—he sees them quoted under 'Watchwords of Wisdom' and shivers with shame."

"Talking of stupidity and the stage," remarked Premlow, "I met an actress in Bond Street the other day——"

"Where's Bond Street?" asked Betty. "We are humble."

The journalist laughed, and Keith glanced at her proudly.

"Bond Street," said Wynne, "is where ambitious souls like Premlow promenade, in the hope of being mentioned among 'well-known people to be seen yesterday.' Go on with the story, Premmy—you're a long while coming to the point."

"Shut up! Well, as I was talking to her, Viscount Armoury passed——"

"The aristocracy do pet you, Premlow!"

"No, but really, listen to this! I don't know if you've seen him?—he'd be a first-rate model

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for a groom. I said to her, 'He doesn't look much like a viscount, does he?' She affected a superior smile—at my *naïveté,* and drawled, 'It depends what you expect a viscount to look like!' It's even betting which of us considers the other the bigger fool now—each of us is going about London thinking that the other has said the silliest thing on record."

Yes, the acquaintances were helpful for a time. But very soon she was unwilling to visit or receive; and, boxed in the three-roomed flat during the long days while Keith was away, she was very dull indeed. Often he took her to the studio, and in a basket-chair by the fire she was fascinated when effects on the canvas leapt into life, under apparently random dabs. As she watched him, alternately retreating and advancing, laying on the pigments with an air of absorption and seemingly erratic brushes, she was reminded once of the picture-bricks of her childhood—a dab could look so meaningless, and, with the next, could mean so much. Yet instinct, rather than any words from him, told her that his heart wasn't in this work, and there were half-hours when she led him to talk of "The Harbour of Souls"—and, indeed, caught much of his feeling for it. Love cannot make an artist, but already love had lifted this clever girl

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above her earlier standpoint of mentor. She no longer counselled him to be "smart"; she had begun to understand that he was to be great. Sitting there by the fire, as he painted the kind of thing that went off best, she often secretly reproached herself for their increased expenditure.

For life in Telemachus Mansions was proving very dear. It had transpired also that "domestic service" did not include attention to "brass, silver, china," and various other articles. In fact, the list of things that the staff repudiated had been so long that, at the first glance, Keith wondered what remained for them to clean. Originally he had arranged for a charwoman to come in once a week, but the flat had accumulated so much dirt under the perfunctory flickings of "domestic service," that soon the arrangement was extended to an hour every morning. Like most charwomen, she had "known better days," and on the mornings when Betty stayed at home, little Mrs. Mills leant on the broom conversationally and narrated her misfortunes, which had been chiefly matrimonial, and partly alcoholic.

She was no saint in tatters, but she was an old and fairly honest drudge, and, far as she was from guessing it, she imparted educative details

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which were worth the numerous half-crowns that Betty slipped into the scarred hands. The disciple in the art of painting remained a laggard in the science of economy, despite her self-reproaches. Betty was always making beautiful resolutions, and always tipping with two half-crowns where other people tipped with twopence. The bent charwoman revealed to the daughter of the millionaire the world of humble hopes. Her confidences unroofed slums, and through the rags of the poor, the girl had glimpses of the humanity and motherhood beneath.

Towards Christmas, she heard from Mrs. Waldehast that Howard had "given everyone a scare, but was convalescent now." She was shocked to read that the scare had been caused by the rupture of a blood-vessel. However, there was no reason to be anxious, she was told: "It was probably the best thing that could have happened, for he had been scared himself, and would doubtless live more steadily in consequence."

She wrote an urgent letter to him, and an anxious one to her father, by the next mail.

At the narrow window she used to sit thinking of what was to come, and watching the snow flutter. She spent many hours thinking. The novels from Mudie's lay neglected; under the

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loudening call of life, she cared less for books. So the new year opened, and the months passed —Keith painting unworthy pictures worthily, to buy peace for his wife; and the girl rearing castles in the air for the wonder-child who was to call her "Mother."

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CHAPTER XII

THE wonder-child lay forgotten in the fender, for the mother claimed all thoughts. Presently she whimpered, "Where's my baby?" and someone turned from her to pick it up. "Now would you like a little son, or a little daughter?" she was asked jocosely. And she quavered, "I don't mind," for fear of hurting the baby's feelings. "It's a boy," they told her; and she was glad.

At last, when they came to him, Keith's mouth would make no sound; they replied to the torture in his eyes. He dropped a touch upon the living bundle—his Universe was beyond the door.

"You mustn't agitate her, remember!"

He was gulping, and shuddering, but nodded sagely. His mind had foreseen her radiant with relief. Her face lay on the pillow like a tired flower.

"Dickie!" she bleated.

In this wise, Richard the Second was born to his kingdom of the third room.

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CHAPTER XIII

And when she was well and saw him in it, her motherhood protested. She had hoped for it to look pretty, and she found it piteous. Her extravagance had run riot in the paraphernalia of infancy; but the nurse's box encroached on the doorway, her garments bulged from the walls —the child was cradled in a cloak-room!

Betty recalled her own nurseries, and resented her babe's.

"Don't you think we might have some of those things put away, nurse?" she inquired once. The nurse was an efficient and dignified person, whose wages were thirty pounds a year, and Betty inquired respectfully.

"Well, ma'am, I'm sure I've done my best. The chest of drawers won't hold everything, and there isn't a wardrobe."

And there was no space for a wardrobe.

"I know; of course a flat is very inconvenient."

"I suppose you'll be moving before long, ma'am?" It was less a question than a mandate.

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"It'd never do to keep the poor little mite 'ere for good."

"You think it wouldn't?" murmured Betty.

"Well, you see what it is for yourself, ma'am —there's nowhere to put a thing down. What he'd do when he began to crawl, I'm sure I don't know! I haven't liked to speak, but, as I said when I came, I've always been used to my two nurseries and an under-nurse. If I'd known what a muddle it was to be, I don't think I should 'ave cared to take the place."

For an indignant moment Betty turned to tell her that she needn't stay in it. But Baby was so safe with her! had not the omniscient "Monthly" herself pronounced her competent? What would befall him if she left?

"We must try to make the best of it for a little while," she answered meekly.

There were many opportunities for her meekness. The "domestic service" of Telemachus Mansions appeared incapable of rising to a nurse's presence, and certainly it did not rise to her bell. She who had been used to an under-nurse to do her bidding remained with her august thumb on the button unheeded. The father, being away all day, escaped most of her grievances, though he heard enough to exasperate him, but the mother had to listen to them all. There are

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no ranker snobs than servants, and the superior references to "Clarence Gate, where, of course, it was all so different and no expense was spared!" were galling to Betty Keith, *née* Lynch.

So was the woman's important demeanour. As she rose when Betty entered, her bearing intimated that to enter was to intrude. "This really isn't the thing!" was stamped on her expression. The very attitude in which she waited implied forbearance, and in the nursery Betty was made to feel less a mother than a visitor.

There was even an afternoon when she was reproved. Nurse remarked severely, "I'm afraid Baby's not dressed as you would have liked to see 'im, ma'am. Everywhere else the lady has always sent for the baby to be taken to the drawing-room."

"Well, I don't come to see his frocks," said Betty.

"No'm. Everywhere else the lady has knocked at the door before she came in."

"I knock too in the morning and at night—I knock before I come into your bedroom. But in the daytime this is the nursery."

"I've always been used to my ladies knocking at the night-nursery and day-nursery as well. In Clarence Gate it was always done. Nobody has ever walked in before. While we're on the

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subject, I may say I 'ave never had a lady want to see the baby quite so often as you do, ma'am. As you know, I 'ave always taken my babies from the month—I am a sole-charge nurse, I know my duties, I'm used to being trusted."

Again, what would befall him if she left? The girl drew a deep breath.

"It isn't that I don't trust you, nurse," she said. "I should like you to understand that I trust you very much or you wouldn't be here. But I don't knock at my nursery door, and I see my child just as often as I please. I am not interested to hear about the customs of other mothers."

She bent over the cot. Would the "notice" crash?

Nurse mumbled, and moved to the washhand-stand. After this there was more tolerance in her manner, though her dignity was still impressive.

Meanwhile, the man was not without his own troubles. In his bank-book the word "Cash" no longer figured, and the numerous entries were all on the wrong side.

The theory has been advanced that artists should be poor, to yield the utmost from their talent. It is also recommended that geese be roasted alive to enlarge their livers for your

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pâté. Keith's experiences did nothing to support the amiable theory. Pecuniary cares neither improved his quality nor accelerated his speed, though a list of sending-in days was scrawled over the mantelpiece for a motto. Out of the studio he would tell himself that, to paint recklessly, only will power was essential—and out of the studio he would register oaths to do it; but the following day would again see him obliterating the work of the day before—plodding with conscientious and uninspired touches.

When he came home disgusted with himself one evening Betty said:

"Dick, I've something to ask you: I want you to paint a portrait of Baby."

"A portrait of Baby? Yes, I've nothing else to do!"

"It wouldn't take you long."

"I'm too hard pressed just now. Besides, there's nothing to paint."

"Nothing to paint?" she exclaimed.

"It's all clothes."

"I guess *I* could find something to paint," she said reproachfully. "He's got the sweetest smile I ever saw, and the way his little hands droop is just perfect. Did you ever see eyes like his in a baby before?"

"Oh, it's a dear little soul—don't imagine I'm

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running it down. I had no idea I could get so fond of a baby; I always thought a child only began to be human when it was two or three years old. But I can't paint it yet, really!"

"All right," she returned crossly. "I'll have him done at a photographer's instead. It's rather a funny thing, I must say, when his father's an artist!"

But in most cases their views about the younger Richard—who had been christened with due pomp—were identical. Once when he lay on her lap Keith announced his intention of giving him boxing lessons before he was sent to school.

"I shan't let him go till he has learnt," he said; "then I'll be sure he won't be bullied by young ruffians twice his size. Every boy ought to be taught before he's sent."

"Were *you?*"

"No, afterwards. That's what makes me keen on it; he shall have the benefit of my experience. If he knows how to defend himself, there'll be no need for him to do it more than once."

"I wouldn't like him taught by a stranger, though," she said; "a boxing-master would be too rough."

"As a matter of fact, they aren't rough—the best men."

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"Well, but for such a little chap——"

"Oh, of course, I shall teach him myself; I'd like to! I'll get him a little pair of gloves, and a little suit of flannels——"

"Oh, won't he look like a duck in flannels!" cried Betty.

"And take him for half an hour every morning! There's no occasion for him to learn a great deal, either; a good lead-off and a quick guard are about all he wants to hold his own."

At this point the future pugilist whined for his "soother," and Betty, popping the india-rubber into his mouth, cooed to him the strange language in which she had become so suddenly proficient.

"I wonder if it understands anything of what you mean?" said Keith, regarding them thoughtfully.

"Mmps!" affirmed Betty. "Of course he understands. Did his father ask such things about him, then, a blessing? And his liddley toofy-pegs hurting all-a-time! There-then-there! Didums-was?" She swayed gently, with her baby on her bosom. "Cuddley up, and coosha-bye!"

The balance at the bank continued to dwindle, and, with it, Keith's store of cheerfulness. In Kensington Gardens the perambulators were fewer now—already many children of more

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prosperous fathers had been taken to the sea. The desirability of the third room was not increased by the summer heat, and there was an evening when Betty referred to their own departure.

"When do you think we might take Baby away?" she inquired. "It's not doing him any good to be in London this weather."

Keith knocked out the ashes from his pipe before he answered.

"I'm afraid we shall have to wait a bit," he said.

The average woman might have asked "Why?" Betty's apprehension was too quick for that; but the average woman would have been much less shocked. Mercilessly as the sense of poverty had pricked since the child's birth, this was its first thrust. The faintness of horror was on her as she sat realising that they were too hard up to afford a change of air.

"I didn't know," she stammered. "Yes, of course, we can go later on."

"I'm awfully sorry; we shall be out of the corner soon. I shouldn't have mentioned it if you hadn't spoken of the seaside. It's only temporary."

"How poor are we?"

"Oh, there's nothing for you to look so anxious

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about! I'm bound to sell something directly. As soon as I get a cheque, you can go."

"Won't you go too?"

"I don't know about that; I can't spare the time."

"Well, but—I hadn't any idea, I don't understand. What has happened, what's the reason of it all?"

"The reason? The reason is I'm not making enough money."

"But—— Have we been spending too much?"

Keith shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose that's what it amounts to. It's not your fault; things have got to be paid for; but everything here costs three times what it's worth. Even when one sells a picture one doesn't see anything out of it."

He refilled the pipe, and for nearly a minute there was no sound but the rumble on the road. At last she said drearily, "There doesn't seem much to look forward to!"

"Oh, I daresay it'll be all right," he sighed.

But she had uttered his own opinion. For a long while he had felt that there wasn't much to look forward to. Unless they got rid of the flat, and led the life primitive in Cornwall—which was out of the question for her—the best that

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he could expect was to potboil adequately. Time for good work there would never be!

The temperature of the third room grew more oppressive, and in Kensington Gardens the children played with spades and pails—souvenirs of the sands. As she took her daily walk under the dusty trees, Betty noted them; but she spoke no more of leaving town.

From New York came the tidings that Howard had been induced to submit himself to a sanatorium in Colorado. She heard that he had really begun to take an interest in his condition, so the news must not be considered bad. On the contrary, the physicians all said that six months of the air, diet, and early hours would effect a cure. The letter was nevertheless startling, for it implied that his present condition was much less satisfactory than she had understood.

In the heat, the nurse's grievances against the staff developed, and at last it was necessary to call Keith's attention to the matter again.

"Oh, send her away!" he cried, for he was tired of remonstrating downstairs. "There are plenty of other nurses to be got."

"Not such good ones, though," objected Betty. "Besides, it's no fault of hers, you know that."

"Well, my dear, I can't go down to the kitchen

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to cook her dinnner, and I can't stay at home to run to her bell. I don't understand why she needs to keep ringing it; it's she who's engaged to look after the baby—the waiters aren't!"

"Oh, don't talk foolishness!" exclaimed Betty angrily. "I've been there myself when she has rung for the bath, and nobody has come for half an hour. She's obliged to ring for something or other twenty times a day."

"It's not surprising they're sick of coming up, then; we can't monopolise the staff—we've only one flat!"

"'Flat'!"

"What?"

"Oh!" The gesture with which she turned from him was intolerant.

"So the flat isn't good enough? Is that what it means?"

"Have I ever said so?"

"It sounded like it just now." His voice quivered under the restraint that he was putting on it.

"And if it did? That wouldn't be surprising either! Don't make any mistake, Dick—I don't shut my eyes because I hold my tongue. If you were in that cupboard that's called a 'nursery' a little oftener, you'd know what it was like to live in it."

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"If I'm not there oftener, it's because I'm working to pay the rent!" He walked up and down, trembling. "This is all that woman!" he broke out vehemently. "I wish we had never seen her. I won't have her here—she shan't stop."

"Oh yes, she shall," said Betty. "Baby can't do without her."

"I say she shan't! She's a firebrand, she's a curse. I've heard nothing but her complaints from the day she came."

"*You* have heard? You haven't heard half."

"I never come back to the place without hearing that nurse wants something altered, or something dear, or something impossible. As I cross the threshold, it's my greeting."

"That's a wicked lie."

"I breathe complaints! I get up to them, and take them to the studio with me, and come home to more. My head swirls with complaints. I've myself to consider too; I've my work to think about. The situation's not luxurious enough for her? Very well, then, she can leave it. Are we to be brought to ruin because nurse gets her dinner late? To-morrow she can dine when she likes—it won't be here. I'm going to tell her so now!"

"You won't!" declared Betty. "Don't do it,

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because you'll have to take it back! I won't have her dismissed—I refuse to put Baby in the hands of a stranger. It's bad enough for him as it is, Heaven knows, without risking his life."

"Risking his life! Don't you suppose I love the baby as much as you do?—he means a great deal more to me than you know. . . . I'm sorry for what I said just now—that was an exaggeration."

"Exaggeration? Exaggeration is a very delicate name for it."

"Well, you were less delicate yourself."

"I said just the truth—I have kept a hundred worries from you; there have been a hundred worries for me that you have never dreamt of. And to tell me that I have greeted you with complaints every evening is an infamous thing."

"I've told you I'm sorry. Besides, I didn't say they were your own complaints. I know very well, if you're being badgered to death, you've got to speak of it to me. Of course you have. I hope you always will—I don't want you to keep it to yourself and feel that you've nobody to talk to. I only say that it gets in the way of the work. I can't paint when my brain's full of bells, and baths, and nurses. I don't see why either of us should go on being bothered by her; I don't see any reason for us to put up with it."

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"Baby's the reason. Think how difficult it was to get any one we could feel confidence in, think of the objects that came—creatures with stutters and squints. To be with baby—he'd have grown up a freak!"

"I suppose they weren't *all* physically afflicted?"

"They were all hopeless—all that *I* saw. If they had their faculties, they hadn't any characters worth mentioning. I could have gone down on my knees with gratitude when we got this woman—I'd put up with anything rather than lose her."

"Oh, well, keep her, by all means! I'll see what can be done. It doesn't seem as if bullying them will do any good. I had better try more tips."

"She comes expensive, I know," said Betty pacifically.

"Oh, I daresay another three or four bob a week will settle it," he returned. And their difference was mutually ignored.

But hitherto, after a difference, they had always "made it up" frankly, and kissed.

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CHAPTER XIV

He received a cheque soon afterwards—for a small work that had been exhibited at the New Gallery—but the price was only forty guineas, and the bank-book told such a sensational story that the visit to the sea was none the nearer. At last he was painting with slovenly speed, painting with his teeth clenched, and Vivard, Kluht, Ellsworthy and the rest of them, saw him often during the weeks that followed. Betty's hundred a year was no appreciable aid to his income. He had to be ready for two rentals, accounts for catering, charges for attendance, and the date for the nurse's wages, to say nothing of incidental expenses. The liabilities fell dizzyingly, and as he ran about London, trying to save the situation, he felt like the juggler with the plates. But he got no applause.

His position in the market began to waver. The dealers were no longer so certain that he was a good investment. The depression might be temporary, but, on the other hand, he might go the way that many another artist had gone after

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marriage. For the present, however, they were not unwilling to invest—at prices; if he justified their earlier expectations, the time was very favourable for acquiring "Keiths"—the work that they bought to-day for a song might be sold a few years hence for large figures. On the whole, they were pleased to see him when he called, though, detecting his necessities, they were much less gracious in their greeting. He waited now at Vivard's before Vivard condescended to recognise that he had come in.

Mrs. Waldehast had missed the season here, but written that she and her husband would be in Europe in the fall. They meant to spend a fortnight of their time in London, and they were coming to see Betty directly they arrived.

Betty awaited them with mingled feelings; she would be very glad to meet Dardy again, but she wished that the meeting weren't to take place in Telemachus Mansions. Though she had winced at the thought of welcoming her to Sibella Road, the little house had looked much better than the diminutive flat. She hoped that the invitation to dinner would be declined; and as she arranged flowers, on the afternoon that the visit was expected, she was painfully conscious that one couldn't furnish a drawing-room with chrysanthemums.

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Mrs. Waldehast came alone, in a motor and a costume that made Betty feel very cheap. It was explained that "Hal had been detained in the hotel at the last moment." They hugged each other and chattered, and Dardy restrained her glances with commendable tact.

"It's just lovely to see you again!" she exclaimed. "How are you? Hal was dying to come with me, but a man he was to meet on business to-morrow 'phoned to say he was bound to go to Paris to-night; so Hal had to stay behind to meet him now. How's the baby? I suppose it's the only baby on this side? Give me another kiss, and tell me all about him. Where's your husband?"

"Dick's very well; he's in his old studio, you know—he'll be back before you go. How did you leave everybody at home? How's Howard getting on? I never have a letter from him."

"Oh, I hear Howard's going ahead, putting on weight. He finds the place very dull, of course, but that was just what he wanted to set him right; he wanted strapping down, and nursing up. The regimen does wonders in these cases. A friend of Hal's last year was much worse than Howard; and they sent him to a sanatorium for six months, and he came out strong enough to

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strangle lions before breakfast. Your father seems in low spirits."

"About Howard?"

"I suppose that has something to do with it, but I think it's more you than Howard; he told me he was glad when I went round—he 'could hear if you were alive'! You don't write to him very often, do you?"

"What am I to write about?"

Dardy Waldehast checked a sigh, and stroked her muff.

"Are you going to sit in those things for ever?" said Betty. "There was a time when you didn't wait to be asked! Won't you stay and dine with us? Perhaps Hal will come too? You might telephone and find out."

"I can't stay this evening; we've some people coming in. Besides, it's just on the cards that Hal might take a notion to run over to Paris with this man—it's a big thing they've got on."

"Well, *you* won't go, will you—you aren't going to rush away from London the moment you arrive? Don't be hateful, Dardy. I haven't seen you for a hundred years."

"My dearest girl, I hope to see you every day for two weeks. I thought we'd have a day together to-morrow. Can't you come up to me in the morning? Or why not come back with me

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this afternoon—*you* dine with *us* instead. What time does your husband come in?"

"He'll be in in about an hour. But we won't dine with you—I'll come in to-morrow some time. Where are you staying?"

"The Ritz."

"Where's that?"

"Why, in Piccadilly! It's the new hotel just open. You don't mean to say you haven't heard of it?"

"I—I was thinking of Paris for the moment," said Betty. But Telemachus Mansions were a long way from the Ritz—in another world—and she had not read of its opening. "Wait a minute; I want to show you Baby!"

Curled ready for her to fetch him, his frills protected by a capacious over-all, he was finishing his bottle. When she instructed the nurse to come and take him away in ten minutes, she blushed for herself—she had lived to be proud of exhibiting a trained servant!

It had been an anxious question, whether he would be at his best this afternoon. For once he showed off when he was wanted to! And at the expiration of the ten minutes, the nurse's entrance, in her immaculate white, was very satisfactory. The cakes for tea, too, were the daintiest obtainable in High Street, and there

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were green sandwiches from downstairs, which would be charged for in the bill at fourpence a bite. For a delusive instant Betty fancied that perhaps her home didn't strike Dardy as so dreadful after all. For an instant only. In the next, she felt more abject for the thought.

The tea lasted until Keith returned; and as he did not enter the passage discreetly, Dardy said, "Here he is, isn't he?" and he was compelled to show himself before he could change his clothes. He was shabby and tired when he greeted her; it occurred to Betty for the first time, while she watched him with veiled nervousness, that he had acquired the air of a failure.

The conversation became forced and insincere. The lady could ask no intimate questions about his affairs, and the man could ask no social questions about New York. It was a relief to everyone when the visit ended. Betty would go to the hotel the next day; Keith's work, alas! prevented his accompanying her. A final spurt of false gaiety, parting kisses, and a trying wait on the landing for the leisurely lift. The upstanding bow in the lady's hat sunk from view —and Betty went into her bedroom and groaned.

Of course on the morrow it was less awkward. The best affection is susceptible to environment. The discussion of the "big thing" had taken

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Waldehast to Paris, as foreseen, and in the pale pink-and-white room overlooking Piccadilly the two women were alone. Just at first there was some embarrassment when Dardy said—

"I'm so mad we couldn't get a parlour on the Park side. Still, it's only for two weeks, so it doesn't matter so much; we can put up with this."

To Betty's senses, soothed by the restful aspect of the room, "putting up with it" sounded a little arrogant. The hostess recognised her blunder, and her words fell fast to cover it.

It was not eighteen months ago that they had talked together of the engagement with the utmost freedom, but the time and the marriage had interposed a barrier, and not immediately was it broken. A sentence, a word, something undesigned, and then the delicate ground was reached. Betty had said, "Of course that's between ourselves!" The rest was easy.

Mrs. Waldehast had come back from Kensington dismayed. With the best intentions, she implored her not to go on humouring her husband's folly.

"It's as much for his sake as for yours that I'm speaking," she said; and though they both knew that it wasn't, the phrase enabled her to

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continue. "Remember you've got a child to consider—it's all very rough on the child!"

"Oh," sighed Betty, "I don't forget that! I never dreamed I could be such a devoted mother, Dardy. I just worship my baby. I could eat him up sometimes." She added dutifully, "Of course I'm very fond of Richard too."

"Of course," said Mrs. Waldehast.

"But I did promise, you know."

"Rubbish!"

"I was old enough to know what I was doing."

"You were, both of you, old enough to know better. But it's never too late to mend. You've given it a very fair trial, I'm sure, and it hasn't worked. You can't pretend that you're content —you can't pretend that *he's* content. He's looking ten years older."

"How do *I* look?"

"You'd look all right if you had a good time again," replied Mrs. Waldehast hesitatingly.

Betty's eyes dilated: "I didn't know I had changed so much as that," she said. "Of course I know what my frock is!"

One night she slept there. London was deluged under a thunderstorm, and after contriving to telephone to Keith and hear that Baby was safe and sound, she had consented to remain. It

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was delightful to be ministered to, to feel her hair brushed by Dardy's maid, and to lie in luxurious contemplation when the maid had gone—Betty didn't switch off the light for a long while after she was in bed. It was delightful, in the morning, to step through her doorway into a white, spacious bathroom, and when she returned, to be met by a maid once more. She went home early, fearful lest the baby had suffered a catastrophe in her absence; and the miniature flat in Telemachus Mansions was fetid to her as she entered. Though Mrs. Waldehast stayed in London for a fortnight only, the fortnight was influential.

So far, Keith had managed either to pay the bills or to conceal from his wife that he had not paid them. Now there came a demand from downstairs which he could hope to conceal for no more than twenty-four hours. It blackened the breakfast table. He slipped the note into his pocket, and she had no suspicion of his burden as he went out; but he went out weighted with the knowledge that he must find thirty pounds, and that there were occasions when thirty pounds were as difficult to find as thirty thousand.

The picture that he had to sell was not everybody's money. He was conscious of it when he started. He was more conscious of it still when he drooped down the Haymarket at noon. It

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was Wednesday, and play-goers were already beginning to assemble at the pit and gallery doors. As he tramped from refusal to refusal, the luckless canvas grew as heavy as his spirit, as heavy as his feet. If he failed, only two courses were open to him: one was to shock Betty by saying that they must pawn her engagement ring; the other was to humiliate himself to Sir Percival and beg for a loan. Of the two, the less execrable was to face the knight, but he shrank from contemplating either.

At four o'clock he was back in Pall Mall. He stood among the sauntering clubmen and the carriages, the canvas still under his arm. As a last hope, the Six Bells at Chelsea! Many a picture had changed hands there for a much larger sum than he was asking. Chelsea was distant, but he would have travelled farther for a chance to-day.

His arrival there was ill-timed. Of the men who painted and the men who bought none was to be seen. The billiard-room showed only strangers; the bowling-green was as fruitless as the transplanted mulberry-tree. Upstairs, he heard, there was no one but a pilgrim, who had entered to walk in Whistler's footsteps and contemplate Carlyle's chair. "There have been

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plenty of the people in," said the proprietor sympathetically, "but they've all gone now."

It must be the loan, then!

From Chelsea to the City. He kept glancing at his watch, fearful that he might not reach the office before his uncle left.

And he was just too late. His application would have to be made at the house! This was even more abhorrent; but anything was preferable to Betty's alarm.

From the City to Clapham Park. On the journey, he tried to fan faith by remembering that the application would be his first, and that his indigence was but temporary.

Never till now had there seemed to be so many stations on the route, and never before had King's Avenue seemed quite so long. There was small-talk to be endured before he could seize an opportunity. "Would his uncle lend him thirty pounds? His need was very pressing, and the sum should be repaid in a month or two."

The knight refused with such blandness that his refusal appeared to ask for gratitude. "The calls upon him lately had been so numerous that they prevented his acceding, but affection urged him to point a moral: Richard should apply to his father-in-law. Rightly regarded, his embarrassment was a blessing in disguise, for it

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indicated the path of duty. To advance the money would, indeed, be a false kindness to him. However! . . . He would stay to dinner? Well, at least, he would have a glass of sherry?"

Keith declined both invitations, and King's Avenue was no shorter as he tramped back. He reached the flat very late, and Betty had already dined.

"I've been wondering where you were," she said. "What have you been doing?"

"I had to go out to Clapham Park. How's the baby?"

"Baby's all right. What did you have to go to Clapham Park for?"

"There was something I wanted to see Sir Percival about."

"I wish I had known you were going; I waited for you for nearly an hour."

"I'm sorry; I didn't know, myself," said Keith.

She asked no further question, and he rang the bell, and had a stubborn drumstick of a fowl and a strong whisky-and-soda. Half an hour passed before he explained matters.

"Oh," he began, "there's a bill owing here for rather a lot; I'm short of about thirty pounds. It has got to be paid to-morrow. It's an awful nuisance, but if you can spare your ring for a

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month or so, it'll get us out of the hole. It's the only plan I can think of, or you may be sure I shouldn't suggest it."

"Why, yes," said Betty faintly, "of course!"

"It's an awful nuisance," he repeated. "The gallant knight wasn't any use; I might have known he wouldn't be."

"Is that what you went to Clapham about?"

"Yes; I thought it was just worth trying."

"Hadn't you thought of the ring then?"

"I had thought of it, but the idea didn't attract me."

"Surely it was better to take the ring than go humbling yourself to relations?"

"I don't know," sighed Keith; "it was your engagement ring — engagement rings seem sacred. Besides, I didn't want you to know we were so hard up. You're a trump to put such a good face on it, but of course I understand. We shall worry through all right, little woman— don't picture us singing in the streets!"

She replied with the ghost of a smile, and for some seconds he smoked in silence.

"Suppose," she said feebly, "we *don't* worry through all right? What then?"

" 'Sufficient for the day——'!"

"This won't do much good. How long will it be before the next bill comes up?"

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"Well, they come up every week, don't they? But we can let them run for a bit again; I don't suppose we're the only people in the place who don't pay regularly. The rent is the chief bother. If that old humbug—— But what's the good of talking!"

"What did he say?"

"Say? He said there were 'many calls upon him'—the house won't see any more from *me!* It was a 'blessing in disguise' to be dunned, according to him."

"How?"

"Oh, of course, he advised me to turn to your father. He knew I shouldn't, but it was a good way out."

"His behaviour to you would be very different if you ever did," she said tentatively; "eh?"

"Yes, I suppose it would," said Keith.

"It'd be 'my dear nephew, Lynch's son-in-law.'"

"I daresay." His tone dismissed the subject.

There was another pause—and her voice was abrupt: "Do you ever think of it, Dick?"

"Do I ever think of it?" He turned white. "Good Heavens, haven't we done with that?" She didn't answer. "*You're* not thinking of it, are you?" he faltered.

"It's getting worse and worse with us, that's

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all. The money is there if you like to take it. It'd make my father very happy, and—and everybody else."

"You?"

"Yes, me too," she owned. "It's no use our fooling ourselves—it can't go on much longer."

"What can't?"

"This life we're leading. We've given it a very fair trial—you don't say it's a success, do you?"

"No," said Keith, staring at her; "no, it's not a success; I'm obliged to pawn your engagement ring, so you ask me to sell my conscience."

"Oh, the ring," she burst out passionately, "the ring is only one thing more! It's petty and mean of you to pretend that you think it's because of the ring. It was bound to come, anyhow, sooner or later."

"It's as well that it's sooner, then," he said sternly.

"So *I* think. I'm sorry it wasn't sooner still; I'm sorry I submitted so long. He's my father, and your attitude is an insult to him."

"Let's be truthful," said Keith. "Your affection for your father isn't very great; you're not complaining of any insult to your father—you're complaining of your own hardships."

"Yes, I'm complaining of my own hardships,

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and my child's! I don't choose to have him brought up in beggary."

"And *I* don't choose to have him brought up in dishonour. Oh, don't let's have another row! Every artist has his ups and downs; if you're patient, we shall be all right yet. There was no mistake about it before we married; you knew what it meant—and you told me I was justified. Don't eat your own words; don't ask me to eat mine." His tone softened. "Won't you be brave, kiddy, and see it out?"

"You don't understand," she sobbed. "I want to be good, I do want to be good, but it's so hard. You don't know what it is to me here—the awfulness of it. I know what I said, and I've tried. I have tried! But I can't bear it any longer, I can't!"

Keith sat down helplessly. "Yes, I understand. I don't reproach you—I was cruel to reproach you. I suppose it's natural that you can't bear it."

"I've done my best. No girl ever meant better than I did. But it has gone on so long."

"Did you expect me to make a fortune in a year and a half?"

"No, but—— Oh, I don't know!"

"Tell me," he urged.

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"I don't know. I suppose I thought it would end the other way."

"I made my refusal very clear, didn't I?"

"I didn't know you'd refuse for ever."

Keith raised his head. "You hoped to talk me round?" he asked hoarsely.

"I—I thought that you might change your mind."

"Oh!" He sprang to his feet. "Talk straight! You married, meaning to persuade me? When you said that you felt I was right, that you'd give the money up, that you were ready to face life with me, it was all a trick?"

"No, it was real, I meant it! It was afterwards I thought you might give in—only afterwards."

He groaned. "What does it matter? You agreed to marry me, and you wish you hadn't—that's what it amounts to! I'm not blaming you—of course it was preposterous, everyone said it was preposterous. *I* was the only fool who believed in it. . . . So you've been miserable all the time? Well, what's to be done?"

"If you'd only let me write to him, we might be as happy as we were at the beginning. You know we've been drifting apart. All our troubles, our quarrels, have come from our poverty—it isn't you and I that have changed to each other,

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really; it's the squalor that's crushing our love. I do want to be good, I swear I do; but my sacrifice isn't helping anybody, nobody is any better off for it. If I knew that thousands of people in the world, or even a few, were happier for what I'm suffering, it'd be easier to bear, I'd see something in return. But I can't suffer for a theory; it isn't fair to ask it of me."

"Well, what's to be done?" he said again. "What you propose is impossible."

"You won't let him help us?"

"No. I don't want to be harsh—I'm too sorry for you, I feel too guilty for having married you—but you and I can't live on the money, Betty. Put that thought aside at last, for the thing will never happen."

"I won't go on as we are!" she cried; "I won't go through any more scenes like this. It has got to be altered now—somehow!"

"What do you mean by 'somehow'?" he questioned slowly. . . . "Do you mean you want to leave me?"

"You will make me do it; I have told you just how I feel, I have told you that I can't endure any more. You must choose between your pride and me."

"And, after all that has been said, from first to last, do you really imagine we should be any

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happier together on his money? You must know as well as I do that it would only make the breach between us wider."

"Well!" The shrug was reckless.

"Well, you must do as you please!" said he.

"You choose your pride?"

"Oh, we won't haggle about words," he said wearily; "call it 'pride' if you like. I've done all I could to make you happy, God knows! But I did you a wrong in marrying you. I understand. I understand your point of view much better than you understand mine. If you want to go, you must go. But what about the baby?"

"Baby?" Her gesture proclaimed.

"No," said Keith; "you mustn't do that!"

"What? Do you think I'd leave him?" she gasped.

"He's my child too—you've no right to take away my child."

"I'm his mother; I'm thinking of him as much as of myself, and more. Is it likely I'd go without him? For me to live in luxury, and leave my baby here? You must be crazy. I wouldn't do it for anything in the world!"

"Well, you see, *I'm* fond of him, and *I* don't mean to part with him, either. That I'm too hard up to content my wife is no reason why I should lose my son."

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"It's a queer kind of love you have for him," she retorted. "You don't mind risking his health in there, you don't mind ruining his future! He might be brought up like a prince—and you 'love' him so much that you're spoiling his poor little life for the sake of your fads!"

"I don't think he will ever tell me I've spoilt it," said Keith shakily. "With my consent, he shall never owe a single advantage to your father's millions, as a child or as a man. And when he's old enough to judge, I hope he'll thank me for having kept his life clean."

"You hope he won't be like his mother, don't you? I hate you! I can't drag him from you, so I'll have to stay, but I hate you! Even if I have to starve with him, I'll stay. He's mine!"

"Good-night," said Keith. "I shall sleep at the studio."

He went to the bedroom, and threw some things into a bag. When he was on the stairs, he remembered the ring, and hesitated. But no, he could send for it in the morning! Almost at the same moment, he heard her calling.

"Here's the ring," she muttered, as he lagged back. She dropped it in his hand, and he was forced to pocket it—and he felt as if he had been whipped across the face.

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CHAPTER XV

THE last time he had awakened in this room was on his wedding day. This morning he woke to the knowledge that his wife remained with him because she would not leave her child. He himself counted for nothing in her life; she had proposed to desert him, only the child prevented her! What did the future promise?

He slunk to the private office of a pawnbroker's as soon as the shops opened, and was dismayed by the latest example of the difference between the purchasing price and the pledging value; he was offered no more than twenty-five pounds.

"Twenty-five is no good," he said; "lend me the rest on my watch, then!"

The elegant assistant retired again, and Keith sketched a profile absently on the blotting-pad till he came back.

"Three pounds ten," he announced, "is the best we can do."

"I always did get a fiver," said the artist reminiscently.

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"Watches," explained the assistant, "have come down so!"

"Well, I'll put the chain in too," said Keith, and the young man quitted the room once more.

He was still unsatisfactory on his return.

"Twenty-five shillings," he said.

"How much is that altogether?"

A rapid pen showed the total to be £29 15s.

Keith felt in all his pockets, and brought forth a gold pencil-case, given to him by Betty, and a silver match-box. "I'll have a match out, I want to light a cigarette," he said. "Will you see if I can have the other five bob on those?"

At last the total was correct, and he took a cheque to Telemachus Mansions within an hour. But he did not go up to the flat. He went away, questioning what he was to do for money pending the sale of work. He had to pay in the thirty pounds at the bank before the cheque—an open one—was presented, and suddenly he wondered if he was the sort of client who was allowed to overdraw his account. The manager's comments on the weather had always been genial across the counter; he had even offered criticisms of the Academy, mistaken, but well-meant. Wild though the attempt might be, it would cost nothing!

Mr. Adams was engaged at present, and con-

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fidence shrank under delay. It was also embarrassing to the novice to feel that his business was divined by the clerk behind the counter. Presently the brass door-knob turned, and the manager's white head bowed a lady out. "I'm very sorry," he was murmuring. It sounded ominous.

Keith shook hands with him, and sat down in the chair that the lady had vacated.

"I want to know if I may overdraw," he blurted.

The manager smiled. Hope leapt high.

"Oh, I daresay," he said. "I suppose you'll soon be doing something with a picture, Mr. Keith?"

"I may sell something any day."

"Oh yes, I daresay we can manage that for you. Up to what amount do you——"

"About fifty." His heart stood still.

Mr. Adams showed no disapproval. "Excuse me just for a moment," he said.

This was too sunny to last—he would come back to say he couldn't do it! Well, keep repeating that it would have cost nothing!

"That will be all right, Mr. Keith," said the manager musically.

"If you've been looking at my account, I may

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tell you I've just given a cheque that'll wipe it clean out."

Mr. Adams' nods were assuring.

"I'm tremendously obliged!" exclaimed Keith, taking up his hat.

"I'm glad we can convenience you. I only wish everybody would cut it just as short. I always know what they're going to say, but most people make me wait such a long time before they come to the point."

It was amazing, but it had happened. A minute later Keith trod the street with his monetary care banished. He wished fervently that this idea had occurred to him before he asked Betty for the ring. His impulse was to redeem it at once, but if he did so, he might have to ask her for it again. The reflection determined him to leave it where it was till he received a substantial payment. A bank was certainly a great institution; how much more complacent than a pawnbroker's! While there were banks, there seemed no reason why he should ever be hard up.

Yes, though the power of fifty pounds would be brief, his monetary care was banished; many an affliction carries an advantage, even the artistic temperament. But the artistic temperament could not lighten the domestic trouble. He went home to dinner reluctantly. Would she

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recur to the subject, or were they to dine in silence, or was the occurrence to be ignored? He decided to say, "Good-evening. How's Baby?" and await results.

"Good-evening," he said. "How's Baby?"

She had been reproaching herself for the "I hate you" all day, and she did her best to answer as usual. Keith, in his turn, rejoined as cordially as indignation permitted. In the heart of each was a hot grievance against the other, and the mutual sham was no triumph of histrionic art.

"Anybody been?" he inquired, with an effort.

"Mrs. Premlow came in this afternoon," she said.

"Oh? What has she got to say?"

"Nothing particular. She says her husband is very pleased with some picture he's doing."

"I've seen it; the thing shrieks," said Keith. "Is that all? Have you been out?"

"I changed my book."

"What did you get?"

"I got Wynne's new one. It's very good as far as I've gone." She picked it up and ruffled the pages.

At dinner it was no livelier.

As the hours ticked by, the tension increased. Both were reading, but both questioned what was

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to be done when he rose to leave again. The man wondered whether she would hint to him that he wasn't to go. The woman wondered whether he would hint to her that he wished to stay.

With equal aversion, they foresaw the awkwardness of the climax. At a quarter to eleven Keith told himself that he would rise at eleven o'clock; but when the signal struck, he still faltered. Over the top of her novel, Betty was relieved to see him fill another pipe.

Now it was a quarter past eleven. It was half-past. The postponement was becoming ridiculous. He got up abruptly. "Well, good-night!" he said, scarcely glancing at her.

"Good-night," she said, just turning her head.

So the custom was established.

Neither regretted it. Very soon the "good-night" held less awkwardness than the "good-evening." He never forgot that he would not have found her sitting there but for the child in the third room. She never forgot that her child was condemned to the third room by her husband's obstinacy. Every evening Keith asked, "How's the baby?" and heard that he was well, and stole in to view him sleeping. Every evening he stood by the cot for a minute, in the nurse's presence, like a visitor.

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When a fortnight had passed, he received a different answer to his question. "Baby has a cold." Even affection found nothing portentous in it. This was on Tuesday.

On Friday, when he returned, Betty met him with a blanched face, and the baby was awake.

"He seems very feverish and restless; I've sent for a doctor!"

None but the parents of an only child know what terror can grip the heart when "Baby seems very feverish." Suddenly the capable nurse appeared a pillar of strength to Keith; his eyes besieged her with inquiries.

"I don't think there's anything to be upset about, sir," she said. "But Mrs. Keith'll feel easier in her mind when the doctor's been."

"What man did you send for? Who recommended him? Did you say he was wanted at once?" Half a dozen questions leapt from his alarm.

The doctor was long in coming, and his unconcerned demeanour was affronting when he came; to him such urgent messages were all in the day's routine. A medical man divides symptoms into the objective and subjective—those that he sees for himself, and those that his patients tell him. And the latter he subdivides into the Real and the Imaginary.

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But when he made his examination of the child's chest, Dr. Griffiths was graver. The respiration was hurried, and caused pain, and the temperature was high. He admitted that the case was critical. Forced to put a name to it, he spoke of pleuro-pneumonia.

"I'd like you to bring a physician," gasped Betty, as the word's left his lips.

He was surprised. His practice did not lie among people who suggested consultations so swiftly. He promised himself a half-guinea a visit instead of three and sixpence. Inhuman? No, human—he also had a homeful of anxieties.

"Sir Edward Cooper is as good a man as you could have," he said.

Sir Edward Cooper came on the morrow, and Keith was there to receive him. The distinguished person only corroborated the struggling man's opinion, and made a perfunctory alteration in his treatment; but he was cheap at the three guineas, for both the father and the mother felt encouraged when he had been. It is among the general practitioner's pains and penalties to see these things; a visit from a title always improves the condition of the patient's friends.

But no improvement was to be noted in the baby during the next two days, though, at Betty's request, the visit was repeated. Keith

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left the flat very late now, and was there again before breakfast. He spent the days pacing the sitting-room and tiptoeing to the nursery for reports. Betty, hollow-eyed for lack of sleep, was no comrade in the crisis. The cold from which the illness had developed was attributed to the fact that it was difficult to ventilate the nursery without exposing the child to a draught. The thought seethed in her: If Baby were to die! She was sorry for Keith's trouble, she spoke every word that was true to sustain his hope, but she blamed him furiously. The mutual grief did nothing to draw them to each other's arms.

No, the husband and wife did not kiss again with tears. She who became strangely devoted was the domineering nurse. She had a nature that put forth its flowers in shadow. The arbitrary snob, who had hitherto found nothing good enough, was now a self-abnegating soul who found nothing too bad. Untiring, unselfish, she bloomed with new virtues hourly. Finally, her tone was even gentle to the waiters.

On the third morning, when Keith arrived he heard in the hall that Dr. Griffiths had been sent for in haste, and was still upstairs. The lift-lad was not in attendance yet; Keith reached the flat breathless.

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Betty and the doctor were in the sitting-room.

"What's happened?"

"He's worse. Dr. Griffiths has just seen him."

"The breathing is very oppressed," explained the doctor; "I'm sorry to say there has been further effusion in the night."

"Effusion?" It conveyed nothing.

"I was just going to tell Mrs. Keith that we should have to draw off some of this fluid—to tap the chest, I mean. We ought to have it done as soon as possible—to-day."

"An operation?"

"Yes."

"Is it dangerous?"

Dr. Griffiths hesitated.

"I should prefer it to be done by a specialist," he parried.

"Yes, yes," said Keith, "of course!"

"I want to understand, please," panted Betty. "I've got to know just what we're risking."

"It sometimes causes syncope."

"And?" She pressed hard.

"With a skilful——"

"And—death?" she whispered.

"Yes."

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"Who's the best man?" she wailed. "I want the best!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Keith. "Before we risk the operation, what's the risk of not operating?"

"You'd be taking a greater responsibility still. To be candid, I must say that such an operation is unusual, and something of a forlorn hope. On the other hand, you can see, by his dusky colour and dilated nostrils, how desperately bad the poor little thing is. If nothing is done, your child hasn't many hours to live."

"You won't mind my saying that we must have that confirmed before we decide? I'd like a second opinion, I'd like Cooper to see him again this morning."

"Certainly."

"Who's the best man, doctor?" she moaned. "Is there anyone that you have absolute faith in?"

"The man to get, of course, if you can afford to have him, is Mr. Wimble, of Bart's. He's expensive—and there's the question if he would operate to-day."

"The expense doesn't matter," she declared. Her eyes met Keith's and challenged him.

"What's his fee?" he asked hoarsely.

"Wimble never operates under a hundred guineas."

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Would the bank grant another overdraft?

"I'll telephone to Cooper now," he stammered. His face was ashen. "I'll see if he can come at once."

Sir Edward undertook to be with them at half-past ten, and Dr. Griffiths arranged to return. Keith followed Betty to the nursery. Beside the cot the nurse was crying—he was sensible of the wonder of it, even in the desperation of his strait. As he watched the little life labouring for breath, as he suffered with it, as he prayed God for it to be spared, he still heard the menace of his wife's words: "The expense doesn't matter."

The bank had scarcely opened when he was with the manager again. This time there was no amazement, the answer was but what he had expected even while he pleaded. Mr. Adams was regretful—the account did not justify consent.

One hope remained—Cooper might avert the operation.

Griffiths' brougham drew up at the Mansions punctually. The physician's motor car heralded his advent soon afterwards.

"The expense doesn't matter!" Still Keith heard it, as he waited for the pronouncement. It "didn't matter"? No, not to her—to her there would be no bitterness, no shame. But to

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him! His resolve to be cast aside, his vaunt of three weeks since annulled in degradation—his son to be saved by Lynch's aid?

The men came back.

"Operate. It'll ward off immediate danger. Wimble, by all means."

A hundred guineas, or his child's life — his child's life, or apostasy to save it!

Apostasy! And his torture made no illusions. He did not strive to think that he would yield because the mother had the right to claim it, he did not palter with any subtilties of right and wrong—his breaking spirit owned that he would yield because he loved his boy.

There followed stereotyped phrases of encouragement, an assurance that the best arrangements should be made without delay. An envelope was slipped into pearl-grey gloves. The lift descended. The motor-car and brougham had gone.

She turned from the window with a slip of paper in her hand.

"I suppose you know I'm going to cable to my father for this money?" she said in a hard voice.

"Yes."

"You can ask the surgeon to wait a few hours for his fee?"

"Yes."

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"Here's what I've written."

He read, "Child dangerously ill. I want a hundred guineas to-day.—BETTY."

"Will you copy it on a form when you go out, and send it so that he gets it about eight o'clock in New York?"

"Yes."

He went out and copied the appeal to Lynch.

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CHAPTER XVI

"WELL?"

"Well, that's all right, sir!"

"Successful?"

"Quite."

"Thank God!" There was something like a sob in his voice. "I'm immensely grateful to you."

"The more urgent symptoms are much relieved, and he may be as well as ever in a week or two. Let us hope so. Keep him quiet. But your excellent nurse knows just what's to be done."

"Have something before you go! Dr. Griffiths, a whisky-and-soda?" He spoke to Wimble apart. "I've dated this cheque for the day after to-morrow. You won't mind holding it over?"

"With pleasure."

The tension was past. The surgeon's bag was no longer an object of terror. He and Griffiths were animated. Betty had shaken their hands and was crying with relief. Then they went, and she gazed at Keith, and froze. Her impulse had

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asked for him to clasp her in his arms, to echo her joy—and she saw a grey-faced man bowed with humiliation. She made no allowances. The baby was safe, and the father could think only of his own defeat! That was how it seemed to her, and she felt him to be egoistic and cold. Dimly he was conscious of his deficiency in her eyes—acutely he was conscious of his solitude—but he had suffered too many emotions since morning to be able to simulate one now. Her anguish during the ordeal, her prayers, her hysterical thanksgiving, all these things he had shared. But once more he stood alone; there was none to share the burden of his self-reproach: "I couldn't pay to save my own child's life!"

Lynch cabled five hundred pounds. The boy's condition improved daily, the nurse regained her dignified demeanour, and by Dr. Griffiths' advice, Betty decided to go with them to Bournemouth for a month.

Keith was staying at home. Poor effort at independence! His wife had written for accommodation at the best hotel; she had bought new clothes for the baby, and ordered new costumes for herself; already she had spoken of renting a larger and expensive room in the Mansions for a nursery. But he wasn't going with her to the seaside!

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How could it end? He put the question to himself hourly after the departure was made. Night after night he sat alone in the flat, remembering the compact and viewing its collapse. The thing that he had sworn should never be, had come to pass—they were being supported by Lynch's money! A debt that might be discharged? To say so would be sophistry. Long before this sum could be repaid there would be another and another—and soon a settlement offered and accepted. The man looked the truth in the eyes. The thing had come to pass!

What was his duty? To forbid? It would be idle. Besides, had he the right to forbid, after what had happened? Hadn't he forfeited the right? She, at least, might say so. To submit? That would mean continuous ignominy, as the price of holding his wife and child. And his child's recovery he owed, under Heaven, to Lynch's purse, and his wife had wished for a separation. Now, of course, she might be satisfied to remain, but her victory made her love no deeper.

Was it worth while to sink to it all, was it good enough? He knew that what he shrank from most was, not parting from the later Betty, but from the boy; it was the boy that made a coward of him. But, again, was it good enough? Of the

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two evils, the lesser might be the wrench. It might, it would, be less awful to lose at once than to lose by slow degrees; less bitter to resign his claim than to see his child estranged with Lynch's finery, bedizened with Lynch's trinkets, fostered, and pampered, and misled with Lynch's wealth.

And he himself would have to share it! The chair that he sat on, and the servant behind it, and the food that he swallowed, would be paid for by Lynch. A daily degradation. For what? He had meant to keep his son unsmirched by guilty dollars, and he had failed. Then let the mother take him, as she had asked—let them go!

He did not come to the conclusion in a night or in a week—or, more exactly, he came to it every night, and then pondered from the starting-point again. But he came to it at last definitely, assisted by a letter, in which Betty alluded to her return and the necessity for the new arrangement.

"I am coming down to see you," he wrote, and he went.

She was out when he arrived, and he waited for her in her sitting-room on the first floor. He noted the extravagance of flowers, and the peaches on the sideboard. Details as they were, they hardened him in his resolve. It hardened

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him in his resolve when she entered, careless and fashionable—a beauty without a scruple, her conscience asleep again.

"You never told me what train you were coming by, or I'd have been in," she said. "Have Baby and nurse came back yet?"

"I haven't seen them," said Keith. "Is he quite strong now?"

"Oh yes, he's splendid."

She unpinned her hat, and put it aside; and hummed a little, to disguise her nervousness, as she drew off her gloves. The man turned to the window, and stood staring at the sea before he spoke. His opening sentences had evaporated.

"Betty."

"Yes?" She tried to sound surprised at the tone.

"You remember what I said before he was ill?"

"What?"

"I had to take it back; his life was at stake—I sent that cable for you."

"You sent it for yourself too; *you* love him, don't you?"

"Yes. I sent it for myself as much as for you. But I only asked for the surgeon's fee. That might have been a loan. Do you think that my failure, my shame—for I was sick with shame, and you knew it—do you think it justified you

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in squandering whatever your father was willing to send? Do you think it justified you in living as you're living now—as you talk of living when you come back? You know perfectly that if I took the room you speak of, I couldn't pay for it. You know our expenses are too heavy already; how do you propose that we should meet more? We must understand each other; I want to know if you're counting on his help for the future?"

"What if I am? I should have thought common gratitude would have removed your prejudice, after what he has done."

"I expected you would say that," he said. "It sounds very well. If you were a fool, I might even think you were deceived by it. So you *are* counting on his keeping us?"

"Haven't we had a lesson? didn't we nearly lose Baby?" she exclaimed. "If he had had a proper room, it'd never have happened!"

"Who says so?"

"Nurse says so. She knows what she's talking about."

"And supposing you hadn't a rich father? What would you do then? Yes, I do love the child too, and his health's just as much to me as it is to you, and I'll make any change for him that I can. But it isn't for the child's health that

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you're spending twenty or thirty pounds a week here, or wearing that dress. I say we've got to understand each other. I must know what you intend to do. If you mean this kind of thing to go on, it means the end of our life together."

She stood by the mantelpiece, her head bent. "You haven't made it a very happy life lately, anyhow, have you?" she muttered.

"I! If a woman speaks to her husband as you spoke to me she has either got to tell him she's sorry, or accept the situation."

"A woman doesn't say she's sorry to a block of wood," said Betty, with dry lips.

"And a man doesn't feel demonstrative towards a woman who only remains with him because she doesn't want to leave the baby. If I had agreed to let him go with you, you wouldn't be here. Well, I take back another thing: I take back my refusal—if he's to be brought up on your father's money, it shall be in New York."

She faced him in a flash, erect and white.

"You'll never say that to me again!"

"I ask you to choose."

"You've told me I may go, and to take him with me. Very well. I'll do it!"

"Oh, play straight!" he cried. "The decision rests with you, not me—don't let's have any humbug about it! If you go, it's because I'm a poor

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man; if you stay, you must act fairly to me. I've come down to ask you which it's to be."

"I am going."

"All right. I daresay your father will be very glad to have you back. Perhaps he'll be able to work a divorce for you—I've no doubt he'll try. . . . That's all, then?"

"That's all."

There was a long pause. The result was only what he had feared, but now that it had come, he found himself unprepared and dazed. His feeling was not poignant—he had been much more moved by many a play; the thing seemed unreal—far more unreal than a play; dimly he was surprised that he didn't suffer. It was strange—their lives were dividing, and he felt no pain; there was none of the chokiness, the protest that he had known in anticipation. He was living the scene apathetically, as he might have lived it in a dream.

In her, emotions clashed and sobbed—misery, and indignation, and self-contempt. If he had thrown his arms round her, she knew that she would have wept her heart out and promised all he asked—and simultaneously she wondered whether she could have kept her word.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" The nurse

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came in, carrying the child. "I didn't know you were here."

"Good-afternoon," he said. "Well, Baby?" He touched a cheek gently. "Are you coming to me?"

"Has he had a nice time, nurse?" asked Betty, her face averted.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. He had a little sleep, too, while he was out. Didn't he, a pet?"

"Are you coming to me?" repeated Keith. "Your father has to go to town again at once."

He held the child, and kissed him. His son had scrambled and leapt to reach his arms a hundred times, and gurgled with satisfaction when there; but to-day there was a wail to be set free. Perhaps the kiss had been too hard. Trivial as it was, the wail distressed the man. He gave him back to the nurse, abashed.

"Well—" he picked up his hat, and glanced towards Betty; "if I hurry, I shall just manage to catch that train," he said, with laboured carelessness. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she answered.

In the mirror, she watched him open the door. The door shut.

"I don't know why Baby should cry for once when his father kisses him!" she gasped resentfully.

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CHAPTER XVII

EVERY day now, as she watched the Channel curling on the shore, she thought of the Atlantic, that was so sadly wide. "I am going to New York, on a visit to my father; I should like you to go with me," she had told the nurse; and though nurse was frankly appalled by the casual mention of such an undertaking, she had, after consideration, assented. And not altogether ungraciously.

So there was nothing to cause delay, nothing to prevent the passages being booked at once, excepting—— What? Betty asked herself why she hesitated, and shirked the answer. From Keith she expected to hear no more. Now, at last, she realised fully that she could never compromise between him and wealth. And she had made her choice, and she had been given the boy. Then why did she wait? She said finally that she waited because she was a coward, too weak to take a decisive step. For shame! Her chin disdained her tears. Impulse lost patience with such folly.

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She wished that Lynch were in Europe. The disorder of the docks, the farewells among strangers, the nurse's protesting eyebrows, all added pangs to her loneliness. And there was no exhilaration in her mood afterwards, when her nervousness for the boy was past, and she sat in her deck-chair, gazing at the desolate sea. She thought of the last time that she had been on an Atlantic liner. Almost all that mattered in her life seemed to have happened since then! Did it seem ages back, that emotional trip, or not so long ago as it was? Both, alternately. She recalled the conferences with Dardy, their scheme to get her own way. Reviewing those days, the girl that she had been looked strange to her; she had not recognised till now that she had altered so much.

Her mind dwelt on the evening when she promised to marry. Common sense would have declared that it must be painful to think of that now, but it was sweet; she thought of it more often than of any later occurrence. How pretty it had been! Dardy had once said, "There's a bad fairy that flies away with our bridegrooms while we're dreaming on the honeymoon—and when we wake, we just find husbands in their place." Yes, Richard had altered too since their marriage! If he had remained the same——

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Time was a brutal thing, a "cynic," her father had called it! If Richard had remained the same, she could have kept her word to him—perhaps. It wouldn't have seemed so hard if he had remained her bridegroom. Still—— Oh, after all, she didn't know that she blamed him—or herself. It was the sin of circumstances; the circumstances had been cruel.

The voyage was long, though she felt no impatience to arrive. Society worried her. The women who talked to her struck her as vapid, after women who had professions, or took an interest in the professions of their husbands. She observed newly that the ordinary woman's interest in her husband's calling was limited to its financial results. She did not want to chatter inanities, or to play games. When the child wasn't with her, she protected herself for the most part with a book, of which she read but little. On the third afternoon, the lady-killer among the passengers attempted to storm the fortress—and for the rest of the trip, he disappeared into the smoking-room when she came on deck. One evening at dinner she asked the captain "how far they had come from home," and she only noticed afterwards that she had said "home," instead of "England."

She rose without eagerness on the morning

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that they were to land. America was near; field glasses were numerous. Everybody else was excited. Americans saw the dear ground of their birth, or their adoption, again; foreigners saw the Tom Tiddler's ground of their expectations.

Lynch flung his arms about her with a sob, and hugged her before the world; and she drooped to him, and reproached herself for not being glad enough to see him. Sayings that she had paid small heed to when they were uttered had crowded back to haunt her, and she thought guiltily of her husband's comment, "Your affection for your father isn't very great." He was crying, unashamed, and for the first time she knew it was pathetic that, worthily or unworthily, the love of an adult is given and cannot be earned.

"Oh, honey, it's good to look at you!" he reiterated. "Is that the baby? Scott, my girl's baby! How are you, how are you, my girl?"

It was queer to be jolted again over the rough roads of the neighbourhood—to see its crude ugliness widen and brighten into the New York that was familiar. It was queer to be sitting in a carriage again, to mount the steps of the house, to breathe the warm air as she entered. There were flowers, flowers everywhere, to greet her, masses of them, blooming in the great hall, and in the drawing-room, and at every turn. "You

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could never have enough of flowers," laughed the old man; "I told them there was to be heaps of flowers to-day—for you! And your own nurseries are ready for your boy! I've got some real fine toys for him there—you'll see. I guess he's too young to play with them yet, but it livened me up to get 'em, and he'll grow."

"You're good to me!" she faltered, moved. "Somebody had better show nurse where the rooms are. Where are you, nurse?"

Nurse was hovering on the threshold, and she came forward—but no longer recognisable. Her dignity was gone. Awe transfigured her. Her mouth was open, her cheeks were bloodless, her eyes started from her head; when she spoke, her voice was but a reverential whisper.

"You had better take Baby upstairs now, nurse —they'll show you the way."

"Yes, madam," she said huskily.

Unrecognisable still, she crept through the fantastic nurseries when Betty followed her. Supported by ivory, cradled in gold, and canopied with rare lace, the babe lay engrossed by his sixpenny "soother"; and the mother, viewing him, wished that he were old enough to appreciate. She craved to hear her child approve the difference; it would have encouraged her to witness his delight. Amid the pomp, the babe lay en-

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grossed by his "soother"—no less happy had he lain in London.

She went down to her own rooms, and the majesty of them startled her now. Yet, like the child, she was failing to enjoy. It was exquisite, it was imperial, but it was not "home." She had contemplated more gaily the bedroom in the Kensington Hotel. On the table was the toilet-service that she had left behind—and as she gazed at it her bosom heaved, her eyes grew wide. She sat down, and rested her brow on her hands.

By and by Mrs. Waldehast ran in to welcome her, and her spirits rose; but Dardy could not stay to dinner, and the evening was passed alone with Lynch. While he exulted over her return, Betty was thinking how perfect it would be if Keith too were present and they were all three happy together.

"It's like old times to see you there," Lynch kept saying, "like old times!" He rubbed his harsh, yellow hands together, rejoicing. "You won't want to talk much about it yet?" he asked wistfully.

"Tell me more about Howard," she said. "How long is he going to stay there? I'd like to go to see him."

"He was writing about coming back a while ago; they were very pleased with his progress.

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But he's been worse again since then—more hæmorrhage. I'm afraid for Howard; it don't seem to be doing him the good that was expected. I guess he'll never be altogether right again."

"Do you mean he'll always be an invalid?" she asked, dismayed.

"I'm afraid," he repeated, with slow nods, "I begin to think we were too late finding out he was sick. . . . It's made me look back, you know, his being like this! He hasn't been much of a son, late years, but I used to have lots of hopes when he was younger. It's made me look back. That's one reason why I'm so glad to have your boy."

"You've been dull, all alone," she said pityingly.

"Yes, it's been lonesome. This house ain't much good to *me,* you know—two rooms are about all *I* want now. But I guess I'll brace up now you're back! I'm going to give you a dandy time, make you forget your troubles."

She sighed.

"How did you come to quit, Betty?"

"It was the same thing. I had asked him before—and he wouldn't!"

"Didn't mind your going?"

"He said himself it must be one thing or the other."

"The child's illness didn't bring him down?"

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"He consented to the cable. Of course he wouldn't if he could have helped it."

"It scared me some when I got it. You were broken up, eh?"

"It was awful! . . . You see, he said the hundred guineas we asked for might have been a loan—he said I had no right to have taken more. It was a blessing you were here. I don't know what we'd have done if you had been away."

"I had fixed that; whenever you cabled for money, you'd have got it, if I was in New York or not." He groaned. "What a pity, poppet, what a pity! Still, we'll ease it up; I'll fix that for you too."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean! I mean I'll make you a free woman. You don't suppose I'm going to see your whole life ruined by that dog? You shall divorce him."

She shivered.

"He said you'd try."

"Is that so? Well, I guess his judgment was right for once. I'll do more than 'try'! I'll have a chat with Dorfman to-morrow."

"I don't think I want you to go to a lawyer yet."

"Why not?" He peered at her shrewdly, alarmed.

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She didn't speak.

"Why not?" he said again. "Don't tell me you're weak about him still? You'll never be so crazy as that?"

"Isn't it all over between us?" she said in a low voice.

"I want to see a divorce. It was 'all over' once before. 'Tisn't two years ago you told me here you'd never speak to him again as long as you lived—and the next I heard about it was that you were going to be married. See here, if I work it for you, there'll be no such great harm done after all. You've had two rough years, but you can cut your losses—you can marry an English aristocrat all the same. The boy won't get the title, but he'll have plenty of money—*I'll* see to that—and you'll be just as fond of the heir."

"Don't," she begged, "don't! I can't bear it."

"What's wrong? He'll be your son as well, won't he? And by a better man! You can love two children, can't you?"

"I should never marry, whatever happened."

"You have heaps of time to change your views. You'll meet a man that's good enough one day."

"I'd never give my child a stepfather, in any case."

"When you like the man, you'll think different. It doesn't pay to make too many sacrifices

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for your children; they grow up, and you're liable to get left. When your boy was old enough to quit you for some girl, and you were too old to get the man back, I guess you'd say you had done a poor deal. One of these days you'll want to marry again, and I mayn't be here to hustle for you then. Get your divorce while I'm with you to engineer the evidence. Anyhow, you're better off free."

But the subject was abhorrent to her, and though he harped on it all the evening, and recurred to it many times during the next few days, she would not agree to his going to his solicitor.

He, on his side, would not agree to her leaving him to travel to Howard so soon, and the days glittered with new colour. If she had found no excitement in the dazzling change, she would have been more than human; she would have been more than human if there had not been hours in which she laughed, and thrust remembrance from her when it clawed. Lynch had opened an account for her at his bank, and once more her means were unlimited; once more she ordered lavish entertainments, and went to others. Ostensibly she was staying with her father for two or three months, and the circumstances of her marriage had been sufficiently sensational for ac-

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quaintances to spare her tactless questions. Her New York was curious, but discreet.

Soon it was only to Dardy that she spoke of Keith, and she did not speak very often of him to her. In their first long talk, Dardy had also counselled her to divorce him, and it had been difficult to explain why she shuddered at the idea.

Why was it that she shuddered? Well, it would mean perjuring herself. Though she had been reared in a world where no one was expected to utter the truth when it was against his interests, the last two years had shown her that there was another world, where people esteemed cuteness less and honour more. That was one reason. Also, she knew instinctively that she would feel worse afterwards than she did now, more contemptuous of herself—more blank.

Oh, but she didn't want to think about it! She would have the carriage round and go and scatter some more money. She'd make up a luncheon party for Sherry's, and go to see a musical comedy in the evening, and have a good time afterwards at the Zeislers' ball. . . . Only, one couldn't have a very good time when the right man wasn't there. Idiot! Was she going to squander her youth regretting? She had pined in her cage, and now she was sentimentalising when she had escaped. "Betty," she advised her-

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self earnestly, "for the love of sense, be consistent, my dear! You've got what you wanted, and still you aren't happy. Nobody but me would have any patience with you!"

Was she already forgetting the waiter with the grubby shirt-front? the chilly entrées, stiffening in their gravy? the white sauce of Albion for the flabby fish, and the white sauce of Albion for the Appendicitis pudding? More than all, was she forgetting the third room? No, memory displayed them to her—in the theatres, in the stores, in the whirligig of waste that was her life. It had been shocking, odious, bitter! She repeated it. She *wouldn't* idealise the execrable because it was past! But she had been unjust to Richard. This she came to see now. Once she said so to Dardy, when they were driving.

"You know, he did all he could for me, but make the one concession," she said. "He gave me every mortal thing I asked, outside that. If he hadn't indulged me so much, we should still be together."

"How do you make that out?"

"He would have had plenty of money for Baby's illness, and we shouldn't have had to cable. It was the cable that brought about the separation—brought about the climax, anyhow. And

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it wasn't his fault that we had to send it, it was the fault of my extravagance."

"It's lucky you were extravagant, then! It's no good, I can't pretend I'm sorry you're here, Betty. Only I do want you to see the business through! It isn't through like this—you're not maid, wife, nor widow. Besides, he can't oppose a divorce—it's only fair to you that he should let you get it."

"I can't see that I've any claim on him that way," said Betty. "Between you and me, I think he's got more to complain about than *I* have; *I've* got Baby."

"Men aren't wrapt up in babies the same as we are."

"Dick was wrapt up in ours."

"And he has his profession. He'll be able to take it easier now; his expenses will be less without you."

"That's true," said his wife mournfully. "He'll do better work now I'm gone. He had to paint down for me; I was a drag on his genius from the start."

Dardy Waldehast's nose turned to one side.

"I never heard he was a 'genius' before!"

"You never heard anything about art at all, that's why! You don't know a picture from a frying-pan, excepting by their prices."

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"Thank you."

"No, and you don't."

"And how much have *you* learnt about 'art' in five minutes?"

"Dardy," she said, touching her friend's hand, "since I went away I've learnt more about art, and about Real Life, than all the women at the dance last night lumped together."

"Better take care you don't bust," said Dardy pleasantly.

"Oh, you may chip me, but it's true. I'm beginning to see how much I did learn. I'm beginning to see how much I lacked—lack. I've had no ideals."

"If you have any more virtues, you'll be impossible."

"Every one of those women, Dardy, had something higher than *I* have!"

"I thought you just said they were infants by comparison?"

"I'm talking about the women in the studios and the attics they called 'flats.' They weren't all clever, but they all lived for something they expected to do, or to see their husbands do. They all had an aim in life. I've *no* aim, except to make my baby happy—and perhaps I haven't gone the right road to do that."

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"I don't know what there is to worry you about the baby."

"I'm not worrying. But I've wondered once or twice."

"Wondered what?"

"Well, suppose he grows up like Richard? The money won't compensate him for the disgrace."

"Disgrace?"

"He'll think it a disgrace if he's like his father. He'll be brought up an American, and he'll love his country with all his heart and soul. He'll want to paint for it, or to legislate for it, or to fight for it; or to work for its glory somehow; America will be a Religion to him. That's how Richard feels about England. A boy who felt the same way about America wouldn't be very grateful to me for having suckled him on his nation's blood. He'd tell me that he would rather have been poor."

After a stare of dismay, the other woman said encouragingly:

"I don't suppose he *will* be like your husband; he'll grow up to take a different view of things."

Betty's eyes were more mournful still: "Y-e-s."

"And, anyhow," continued Dardy, "isn't that tall talk rather rats, considering? You're going grand slam on 'the nation's blood' yourself, you

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know! I don't want to rub it in, but your father has made it very soft for *you*. It's a bit thin to spout heroics and go a splurge on his money at the same time."

"Don't you think I know it?" exclaimed Betty. "I'm the meanest skunk that ever lived! I know that! I know my father deserves to be loved by *me*, at any rate, and I'm ashamed that I don't love him more, and I've hated myself for it since I've been back. But you can't force your love, and you can't quell your love; you've got to take it as it is, like the sun in the sky. I'm a fraud. I want to be good, and I haven't got the grit, that's what's the matter with me! When I do right, I'm miserable; and when I'm wicked, I'm not at peace either. There's no place in the world for such a shilly-shally to be happy in!"

"You were all right before you met this man —you had none of these crazy notions then."

"That isn't so; you know it isn't. I've had the thoughts always. He only strengthened them. But they usedn't to come so often. They didn't come so often even when I was with him. While I was hankering after the dollars, I didn't seem to feel they were so guilty. But now I've got them again, and I'm spending them, and—— Oh, Dardy, the truth's beastly close!"

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CHAPTER XVIII

GONE! No letter from her, no line. For weeks he had nursed hope of an olive twig, the merest hint. Gone—marriage, fatherhood, every aim but art that he had known during the two years that counted most! Once he had lived alone and asked for nothing better; to-day his spirit listened for her voice, and waited for his child's in every waking hour. Once he had called it peace to be alone; to-day he called it desolation.

Wrench up a life by its roots and bid it bear flowers! Only his art remained, and as yet he could not paint.

The flat was shut. He would never enter it again. If he could find someone to relieve him of its burden, he would try to work in the country. In the meantime, the additional expense of accommodation there forbade the plan. He stayed in London, and lived at the studio.

Gone! Wretched as he was, he did not delude himself. He was not longing for the woman that she had become, but he was in love with the woman that she used to be—or seemed to be; had

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briefly been! Remembrance gave her back to him in many scenes, and all were early scenes. Sometimes he communed with her in dreams, and woke with the magic of her presence still clinging to his senses. To wake was to lose again. And the Betty he had just seen lived in his dreams only now! He felt that bereavement by change was more poignant than bereavement by death.

He spent the evenings smoking alone, or roaming about the streets. To his club he had gone seldom since his marriage, and now he shunned it rigidly. Nothing would induce him to allude to the circumstances—let time reveal them! Everybody had told him he was a fool at the beginning, and, among themselves, men would say worse of him henceforward. Such sympathy as people had to spare would of course be given to her—the victim of his high-flown ideas. Well, Heaven knew she was welcome to it! For that matter, he would far rather she received sympathy than blame. Yet he felt it to be a little hard that, suffering as he was, he must figure in the world's eyes as a husband without affections, a brute who had sacrificed his wife and child on the altar of his vanity.

We judge humanity by the few humans we have known. Keith had known none to say to

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him, "You are right." No man had owned, "You are practising only what we preach—to be consistent, we should all have to do the same." On the contrary, Lynch's censors had counselled his son-in-law to take his money. Keith had no hope that the world would be just.

Of course he said that he didn't care, that his plight was too black to be darkened; but we all want justice, and he did care. When necessity drove him to an easel at last, work, by very slow degrees, yielded his only solace. The sketches of his wife, which he had removed from the flat, faced him on the walls—Betty in a white dinner-gown, and in a rose peignoir, and coiling her hair before a mirror; Betty saying, "Mr. Keith, You will please Take Me Back to the Room"—each of them a reminder and a pang. The sight of them hurt him so much that he huddled them all into a corner one day; but their banishment hurt him so much that he put them back again.

And meanwhile his wife, too, was lonely, although she lived in crowds. It was painful to discover that Dardy and she were not such chums as they had been. Like the women on the boat, the friend of her girlhood seemed very limited now. When Betty was earnest, Dardy was bored; and when Dardy was vivacious, the subject was not very interesting to Betty.

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When she had been back a month, she insisted on going to see Howard without further delay. Lynch professed to be unable to leave New York just then, and she travelled to Colorado with her maid.

In truth, she had been less eager to see Howard than to withdraw from the social world, and here again she reproached herself for coldness. It was queer that the only real love that she had felt had been given to the husband whom she had deserted and the son who might live to condemn her!

"I've had the thoughts always—he only strengthened them." It was true. She wondered if, without his influence, they would have grown to daunt her as they did to-day. Most likely not—she would have become callous, like Dardy! But she had met him while she was still impressionable. Now they were supreme.

And also she had come to see that the shame of the money was not her only shame—she saw that, even if her luxury had been honest, it would have been insufficient to content her apart from him. In the solitude of the night had she made these meditations? She had made them no less often in the crowds where bands were playing. The perception of her mind and soul's development had come to the woman at all hours. It had

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trespassed upon ballrooms and intruded into restaurants.

And while she travelled to her brother, she thought what the landscape would have meant to Keith.

The journey was very tedious to her—and she reflected that to him it would have been a novelty to travel in such a train. They reached Fernando Prospect on Tuesday, many hours late. It was ten o'clock in the evening when they entered the ramshackle station, but the conveyance was waiting to take her to the hotel. A warm wind raged, as if to sweep the little town to ruins. She saw a belated fruit-seller clinging breathlessly to palings for support; her stand had been overturned, and the road was ruddy with fruit. Sweeping and volleying, the wind fought the carriage as the horses ploughed forward. It looked to her a strange spot for the cure of phthisis.

At the hotel she learnt that the wind was "dropping now," and she wondered what its force had been originally.

Early next day she was at the sanatorium, and in the reception-room it was broken to her that the case was hopeless—Howard was dying fast. She was told that a letter had been posted to Lynch just before the receipt of the telegram

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announcing her departure. Even under the shock, she realised that, from mercenary considerations, much of the truth had been withheld hitherto—that the patient had been too profitable to be relinquished. But it was no time to make reproaches.

The wasted face that turned to her on the pillow was a sermon on the wasted life.

"Ah, Betty," he said tonelessly.

The nurse left her alone with him, and she drew a chair to his side. Beyond the bed, all was sweet air and flowers. Colorado was fair this morning. Her view was a peaceful yellow world—that, and the gaunt face of the dying man.

He did not know that he couldn't recover; he talked of "getting out of this hole before long —coming back." Often as he dwelt on his symptoms, she noticed that he never spoke of the "disease"—it was always the "illness." Yet he seemed to understand that he could never again be quite as other men, and his first allusion to her marriage was coupled with a lament for himself.

"We've both made a mess of it, old girl," he said, "eh?"

Fits of coughing interrupted his speech and left him very tired. He had had a bad night,

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so she had been advised not to stay long. But she returned in the afternoon.

He had become very peevish and exacting, and she admired the gentleness with which the nurse answered when he grumbled at her. Was she so kind when no one else was there? Betty asked. Yes, he had praise for his nurse—strange praise on Howard's lips: "She's a real good woman!" he said. She was young, and refined —many less attractive girls expected to make great matches. Though there was nothing singular about her, she was extraordinary to Lynch's daughter, who contrasted the arduous life with her own.

"You have a great deal to do, nurse," she remarked on the morrow. Howard was sleeping, and they were together in the adjoining parlour.

Nurse Emery looked gratified.

"I wonder you think so—what you see isn't much! The visitors don't see the work. As a rule, visitors think a nurse's life is very 'pretty.' "

"*I* think it must be terrible," said Betty. "Are you an enthusiast?"

"I would rather do this than anything else I am capable of."

" I meant, did you go in for it just for the love of it? I know there are girls who do."

The head-shake was prompt and cheerful.

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"Oh, no, Mrs. Keith; I'm not a heroine—I had to make a living, and I chose the way I liked best, that's all."

"Does it lead to anything?—is there anything to look forward to?"

"Why, no; I expect I'll be nursing as long as I'm strong enough."

"And yet you seem so contented?" said Betty wistfully.

"Well, I've got to make a living somehow," repeated the girl; "whatever I did, it'd mean work. And this way, I'm helping other people at the same time. That keeps one's heart up; there's some pull about that!"

"Yes," murmured Betty, "there must be some pull about that!" But she wasn't so sure of her being no heroine.

She went each morning to the sanatorium. She sat daily in her brother's rooms, overhanging the yellow, smiling landscape, that looked so remote from death—sat learning to be patient, recalling his childhood, enduring his hopes.

His body was taken to New York.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE old are frightened when the young die. Though Lynch's love for his son had grown less as the boy grew older, his consternation was deep —far too deep for Betty to startle him yet with the thoughts thronging her mind.

She lived very quietly now, and the retirement was welcome to her. But retirement could not still her memories of Keith, it could not pacify her conscience. She had failed. She was bringing up his child on the wealth that he condemned, and she revolted at the knowledge.

Defenceless, for she had admitted his right to condemn! She had chosen evil seeing it to be evil, chosen it with her eyes open, understanding all—except the latent truth within herself.

They owed it to this wealth that their child lived! Inscrutable! It might be that the very dollars which saved him had cost the life of another. Well, if it was heinous so to save one's child, she took the sin upon her soul, as Keith had done, without repentance. But afterwards? No obscurity there! The facts blazed fiercely.

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Not gratitude nor necessity could be her plea. She had sinned because she was a coward. She had pillaged for her own ends.

From Lynch she must at present withhold her intention, and she had to unburden her mind to someone.

"I mean to go back," she said to Dardy two or three weeks after the funeral.

"I thought you would," said Dardy, with a shrug. "What good do you think that will do?"

"For one thing, it will make me happier."

"It won't last any longer this time than it did before—it won't last so long!"

"I mean it to last all my life this time. And it will—it's different now."

"I don't see where the difference comes in."

"Before, I had no idea what it would be like; now, I know just what I've got to expect."

"And you know you weren't able to stand it! Why should you stand it any better now? It's easy to be courageous while you're safe. Wait till you get back—you'll find it all as impossible as ever! . . . If you had let your father do as he wanted, you'd have spared yourself all this kind of thing. Get comfortably divorced, and you'll know where you are—you'll feel settled then. And much better for your husband, too! He'd know this resolution of yours wouldn't wash. It's

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a muddling sort of life for a man to have a wife always saying 'Farewell for ever,' and 'Here I am again!' If you returned to him to-morrow, you don't suppose he'd believe in your promises?"

"No," said Betty, "he couldn't believe in them a little bit; I've given myself away too much for that. No, I've thought all that out. If I went back to him now, it'd be a big mistake—he'd have no faith in me, and I'd have no right to expect it. It'd be a sham homecoming, and that would be horrible! But it isn't what I mean to do. I mean to educate myself first."

"What?"

"I have got to live like that alone. Then when I go back to him, there'll be no doubts to spoil our meeting. I intend to go to him as a wife who has proved herself; I am going to be able to say, 'I have done it, so I know that I *can* do it!' Only it'd be cruel to leave here so soon after Howard's death—I must wait a month or two."

"You're going to live like that alone?" cried Dardy. "How? What are you going to live on —'genteel poverty' from your father? If you can accept a little, you can accept a lot—the money isn't any purer taken in small quantities."

"I am not going to have anything at all from my father—I shall manage on my own money.

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If I live in England—and I want to be in England—it'll mean nearly two pounds a week. There are plenty of women there who live on less."

Dardy Waldehast opened her mouth as if to exclaim, but regarded her friend in helpless silence. At last she said feebly:

"Two pounds a week?"

"Plenty of women there live on less," repeated Betty. "Why shouldn't *I*?—I'm not a fool."

"Women! What sort of women? There are women who tell fortunes with birds on the sidewalk. What's that got to do with you? You must be out of your head? *You* don't know how to tell fortunes with birds or live on two pounds a week, do you?"

"No, no better than you, Dardy. But I'm going to learn—not how to tell fortunes with birds, I have no use for the accomplishment—but how to make myself a real wife for the man I married. That's the object of my life—and I'll put up with some pretty rough times to succeed. Don't make a mistake: I'm quite aware what two pounds a week will be to me! I was frightened on ten—on two, I shall feel as lost as both the Babes in the Wood at the start. But I know that shoals of women do contrive on that—and gentlewomen—and what *they* are capable

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of doing, *I* will become capable of doing. I don't choose to remain inferior to any woman living; I don't choose to lose my husband and my self-respect because other women know more than I do."

Dardy groaned.

"You'd be less demented to go right back to him! You in London, on two pounds a week? Hanging out the washing on the tenement balcony?"

"I'm not going to live in London; I'll go to the country, where it's cheaper, and the air will be better for Baby. I'll have rooms in a village. Why, we knew people who looked forward to rooms in a village somewhere—it was their Newport; they were 'lucky' the summer they could afford to go."

"Some people are lucky the summer they go hopping. It all depends what you're used to. Your plan's farce. The baby prevents it right away—your nurse wouldn't stay with you."

"Of course she won't stay—I won't be able to pay her wages. I'll take nurse back to England, but we shall part in town."

"You're going to be his nurse yourself?"

"I'm going to be his Mother. That's just part of the education. I've adored my baby, but I haven't done anything worth a cent for him.

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Well, I'm going to begin. And he'll love me better for it soon, too! I had my first lesson last night; she thought it was a caprice, but it would never do for him to be left dependent on me while I could only kneel down and worship when he was dressed to kill. Dardy, I tell you he seemed more my own son in the five minutes that I was splashing his little duck of a body in that bath last night than he had done in all the months since he was born! I was covered up in nurse's big apron, and he rolled on my lap like a little wet cherub, and I couldn't dry him for joy."

"Betty, it won't work!"

"It has to work. The only thing I'm wondering is how I'm going to take him out—I'm not keen on pushing a baby-carriage. But perhaps in the country I could get a girl to come and do that for a trifle. I'd go with her to see that nothing happened."

"Are you proposing to make your own bed and cook your own dinner, too?"

"No; in English 'apartments' there's a 'landlady' who does that."

"Just as well to be thorough while you're about it, don't you think?" said Dardy drily.

"I mean to be thorough. My aim is to learn what I need to know. If I learn how to content myself on two pounds a week, I'll have done all

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that's necessary, and more—he never asked me to live on so little."

"And how long do you give yourself to learn it?"

"Well, I can't say that. I expect it'll be hard."

"Yes, I should say it would! You've been wasting money all your life, Betty—you don't imagine you can become somebody else because you want to? Your intentions are all right—I appreciate them, from a distance—but you can't dye your nature another colour in a few months with a course of noble intentions."

"I'm not thinking of a few months," said Betty pensively; "I'm hoping I may get used to it in about a year. When I go, there'll be another dividend towards the passage money—and I'll travel cheap. A year's a long time. Say there were three months to despond in, and three to begin to lift my head up; then I'd have six months left to get cheerful. I don't think that's too sanguine?"

"Aren't you overlooking that you had about twice as long to get cheerful—and couldn't do it? On more than two pounds a week!"

"Yes—I mean 'no'; I'm not overlooking it; I've said that myself! But I *have* altered through good intentions—and perhaps more through bad mistakes. It may be just as well that I came

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back—if I hadn't come back I might always have craved for it. I've realised myself here. I shall never crave any more, because I've found it doesn't make me happy now I've got it. And that 'twice as long' was education too. I know now it wasn't all wasted, though it seemed to be. And there's another thing on top of that: I had Dick to indulge me before, and I wasn't earnest enough to say, 'Don't do it.' This time I shall stand alone; this time there can't be any compromise in any moment—I've either got to learn the lesson, every line of it, or be ashamed as long as I live. I'm fighting for the Right. Why, I'm so sure I'll win at the finish, that the worst part of it all won't be the struggle—it'll be letting Dick think that I'm still here without a conscience. I can't help that. I daren't let him hear from me till I'm through, however long it takes."

"Why?"

"Because it'd be the end of my plan—he'd make me go back to him before I ought, and before he truly wanted me again. He *shall* have faith in me before I go! I don't allow my husband to 'rescue' me out of pity. He's got to come and want me as he never wanted me in all his days—to be in love with my soul as well as my face; he's got to feel that I'm just the one thing in this world that could make life worth

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living for him." The dimple confirmed the chin —"And then it'll be good enough!"

Dardy was glad that the news wasn't to be broken to Lynch yet—in a month or two the fervour might subside. But she shuddered. Though she had scoffed at the project and called it "farce," something in her—an instinct of her earlier self—had been impressed. The earlier self believed, so the later woman was alarmed.

It was more than two months afterwards, the night that Betty broached the matter to her father. He brooded less on Howard's death. The fascination of finance, the subject of her divorce, were again dominant in his mind. She felt that it must be now or never that she told him. But it punished her to deal the blow. With her deeper comprehension of herself, she entered more fully into the feelings of others. At once less artful and less shallow than she had been, she understood what the parting would be to him. Development is the gift of events, not of time. The girl had gone who only two years ago had told him carelessly that she meant to take a trip to Europe, when she meant to meet her lover on the steamer. The Betty of to-day could have done that no more than she could have lost sight of her purpose to chatter about curling-irons in the stateroom.

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"Father," she said, "I have got to say something that will make you feel bad. I am missing my husband."

It seemed to Lynch that his heart sank slowly till it lay a weight in his stomach. He blinked at her silently.

Then he said:

"You ain't missing him, honey; you've got the hump, that's all. It's natural—you can't have any gaiety now. We'll put that to rights before long, though; hold on a bit!"

"It isn't that. I'm thankful to have no gaiety. I've been missing him from the day I sailed. It was more than a little to get away from the gaiety that I went to Fernando Prospect. You see—you see, I love him! That's the whole story."

"What's the good of loving him when he won't climb down? I want you to be happy, you know that, but it don't rest with me. When you told me, at the start, you thought so much about him, I said, 'Well, you shall marry him, then!' Didn't I? It wasn't what I aimed at for you, but I knuckled under. I'm ready to knuckle under now, but what can I do? If it was him that was talking, instead of you, I'd soon fix things; but if *you* make the move, it isn't easy to make the conditions."

"I don't want any conditions," she said.

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"That's the part that's going to hurt you most, but I've got to say it—I know he's right."

He didn't start, but his gaze widened at space. Again there were seconds before he spoke.

"See here, he has put his principles first, not *you*. Some people might deduce that he's not attached to you—*I* don't now, I've lived too long. But, in your own interests, try to answer this straight—is he as fond of you as you are of him? If that's so, we'll get him over on some pretext—cable him you're sick—and I'll fix matters then, or you may call me a fool."

She demurred in a low voice, "I don't want them 'fixed.' I mean it to end his way. That's real. No one can alter it. It'll pain us both for nothing if you try. I've meant it for months, but I couldn't tell you before. Father, it has got to be!"

Lynch put out his hand mechanically for a cigar, and bit off the point, and struck a match—all slowly, still with the unseeing stare. The match burnt to his fingers before he thought to raise it. He let it fall—and took the cigar from his mouth.

"W-e-ll!" he said submissively.

"I want to go at once. I'm going to stay in the country there first—I have got to learn how to do better before I meet him. I want you to

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send me the interest on my own money to live on."

"Are you remembering what it is?"

"Yes. I'm going to send nurse away; I'm going to live like a poor woman. I shan't write to him while I'm there; I must qualify myself for our life together first. If you find out where he is and give him my address, you'll ruin the only chance of happiness that I have left. It would be no use my going to him till I'm ready."

"If you can live on ten dollars a week, you're ready now," moaned Lynch.

"No, I'll find it very rough on ten dollars a week for a long time. I shan't be ready till I find it smooth."

"Betty," he sobbed shrilly, "I can't bear you to do it!" Tears gushed from his eyes. "You're all I've got now. For God's sake!"

"I must," she said.

"Don't quit me like that—to know you're in want. Think what I'll feel!" The next instant the bent figure shot upright, he stood erect, livid, terrible in fear. "What when you get it all?" he gasped; "when I die?"

She slowly shook her head.

"You must!" The man was a tempest, raving, overwhelming her. "When I'm dead, it'll be yours now, all—you must!"

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"No."

"Do you know what you're saying? There's no one else—you must!"

"I can't, I wouldn't! Don't leave it to *me*."

"Who then?"

"The nation!" she begged. "Make amends!"

"Amends?" he screamed. "For what? To Hell with the nation! My life's work to my flesh and blood!"

"I'd do what's right. Why not *you?*—it'll cost you nothing. If you leave it to me, I'll never touch it, I swear to Heaven I won't! Then why not *you?* Do it yourself. Why not? Let them say, 'At the end he did good'!"

"Do I care what they say? did I ever care? shall I care when I'm dead? My life's what matters—what's my life if I know you'll refuse my money when I'm gone? It's the work of sixty years you talk of wasting. Betty, you'll be one of the richest women on earth—kings and queens will envy you. He won't ask you to refuse when I'm gone—it's me, my name, that's the trouble. When I'm gone, he'll 'forget' where it all came from. Pay a million pounds to charities—nobody'll criticise the rest. A million—all the world'll 'forget' for it!"

"No."

"You shall!" he shrieked. "It's my lifetime

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you're pitching away. Pay two millions, three millions—pay ten millions if you like—you can be called a 'Saint' for ten millions! You shall keep the rest—you *shall!*"

"No!" she cried—and he struck, frenzied, at her white face.

Their eyes met aghast. He dropped into a chair, a quivering, shrunk old man.

"I didn't know I was going to do it—I didn't know!"

Her arm went round his neck. "It doesn't matter—I understand."

"I've struck you! I've struck my girl! Betty, my honey, forgive me!"—He fondled her hand convulsively—"I've struck my girl! Lovey, I didn't know what I was doing, I'm broken up. Betty, you'll take it back? Have mercy! Think what it means to me! My brains, my schemes for nothing—ruin, from *you!*"

"I can't take it back," she groaned, "you know, you know I can't!"

"I know? I wish I'd died before you could tell me! What have I to hope for, what's left? All the work of my life scattered! Have you got no feeling?" His sobs tore his chest. "O my God, I never was hard in my home, but it has always been my children who've made me suffer!"

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CHAPTER XX

It had been a pitiful leave-taking. She had instructed the bankers to close her account, and to transfer the balance to her father's; she had set her foot upon the narrow way. But she wore no crown of righteousness to mark her dignity, she knew no glow of virtue to light her path. As she had said, she understood—and to understand was to suffer. She knew that he ranked her now, must always rank her, among his enemies—and of all his enemies the worst. In his eyes, she was without defence; she was a daughter who had repaid devotion by a callous wrong. When she had been weak, his home, his fortune, his arms, all had been open to her; now that she had gained strength, she had laid waste the achievement of his life.

Perforce! She had had to deny his plea, or sin towards her conscience, and her husband, and her boy. Now she realised what Keith had suffered in denying her own plea. But it seemed to her very cruel that she could not do what was right without breaking a heart. She was not the

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woman to view herself as an appointed instrument of Retribution—she was only a very human woman, trying to be good—and she sorrowed to feel that, not by the vengeance of the multitude, not by the Hand of God, could her father have been stricken more utterly than by this inevitable blow that was dealt by her. He was left to contemplate millions that were useless, a dominion that had crumbled, a palace that was void. Beggary itself would have been more merciful if it had spared him his child. The havoc was complete.

It was early April when she arrived in England. Until it was settled where she was to live, she must retain the nurse, for she could not take the baby with her when she looked for country rooms. For the interval she had thought of a boarding-house in Bloomsbury; but even heroism may shrink from English boarding-houses—or from the boarders. Besides, she might need to stay in town only for a night or two. The reflection consoled her for the comparative extravagance of a cheap hotel—where she avoided the nurse's eyebrows.

Only in a village could she hope for her income to suffice, and her mind had turned to the one village that she knew. The weather next day was favourable—if the morning had been wet,

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she was afraid that she might have been cowardly enough to postpone her quest. She left the hotel after breakfast, and took a motor bus to Charing Cross, and a second-class return ticket to Tunbridge Wells. Up to the last minute she had meant to travel "third," but the resolution forsook her at the booking office, and she promised herself to atone for the indulgence by lunching on sponge-cakes.

And in Tunbridge Wells the sun shone too.

It was a black-robed, grave-faced Betty who walked across the common into Rusthall, and met at every step the gossamer Betty of the honeymoon. It was a new and nauseous task to knock at cottage doors, where dirty children swarmed, and ask, "What have you to let?" It was appalling to discover that the villagers referred to the "season," and "extras," and glibly mentioned "guineas." A milkman rested his pails and recommended her to try Bon Repos in Paradise Road, and she gave him sixpence, and reproached herself for it all the way there. It must be twopence in future; she must never forget that again! But the dumpy villa was so much superior to the costly cottages that she feared the milkman had been deceived in her position. She rang the brass bell diffidently.

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A servant advanced along the passage—oh, the place was beyond her means, she might have known it!

Would she step inside?

Amazing that a white woman could make a room so hideous!

The householder entered, wreathed in beams, and beads.

"Apartments?" Her beam subsided. "Oh no, I never let apartments!" She seemed rather hurt by the suggestion. "I only take P.G.'s."

"I beg your pardon?"

"P.G.'s," said the lady ingratiatingly, "er—paying guests."

"Thank you. I am so sorry to have troubled you for nothing."

It was a miserable day. There were moments when she sat on a bench and could have cried with disappointment and fatigue. She had pictured herself arranging the matter soon, and peeping at the Happy Valley before she returned; but the hours went by, and the sun went down, and still the multi-millionairess *in posse* was homeless on the common.

At the baker's, where she had had her frugal luncheon, she had a late tea, and the baker's daughter, on hearing her difficulties, recommended her to try Mrs. Purdie, at 3 Fuchsia Terrace.

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Mrs. Purdie proved to be a large, untidy, cheerful woman who offered an airy bedroom and a little ground-floor parlour, with the use of the harmonium, for fourteen shillings a week. She explained that she had never taken lodgers yet, but that her neighbour, Mrs. Wright, was "putting her in the way of things—and you'll be quite comfortable with me, my dear!" At this stage, cheerfulness was welcome, and criticism was not acute. Betty settled to go to her on the following afternoon.

So on the morrow the nurse—bound for her parents', in Felixtowe—kissed the baby goodbye; and she kissed him with so much emotion that Betty's mouth quivered in parting from her. "I'll give you a perfectly splendid character when I'm written to, nurse," she said, "you may rely on that! You quite understand that you're not leaving me because I don't appreciate you?" She was conscious, however, that "Fuchsia Terrace" did not sound an impressive address. And then the nurse's luggage was put on a cab; and then the other luggage was put on a cab; and last, Betty and her baby went forth together.

As she carried him down the steps, his solemn eyes seemed to question her; but, as well as if he could express himself, she felt that he agreed with her during the drive.

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"You know we're doing the square thing," she prattled, "so you'll make it as light as you can for momma, won't you, Ducksums? Don't cry till we get there, if you can help it. When we're alone, we can have a good howl together, but we'll keep up our pluck in front of strangers, my son! And you shan't ever miss your nursie—your mother'll be as good, and better, to you all day long."

He was heavy for his age; her arms ached amid the confusion of Charing Cross. "Her baby and her baggage give momma plenty to watch, don't they, Richard mine?" she murmured. "Patience, sonny, we'll get through in time. There are green trees at the end, Richard—trees, and the Happy Valley!"

Well, he was only a year old! If he did fret a little, could she be surprised? "Is it that 'Second' on the door, my sweetheart?" she cooed. "To-day it'd have been 'Third,' if I hadn't taken *you;* but I couldn't be mean to you after luxuriating yesterday myself. Look on the bright side, Belovedy—we've got the dusty compartment to ourselves, and that's much to be thankful for!"

In the fly that took them into Rusthall he fell asleep on her breast, and he wept at being awakened. Their arrival was noisy with his displeasure, and the cheerfulness of Mrs. Purdie,

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and the excitement of anæmic and unsuspecting offspring. Mrs. Purdie bawled that the table was set for tea. The fact was obvious, but she dwelt upon it. She was astonished to hear that he had a bath every night—her neighbour, Mrs. Wright, had told her not to supply a bath oftener than once a week. Still, the warm water was provided, and Betty dried him with the solitary towel that was displayed.

When he slept again, she went down to the sitting-room, leaving both doors open, that she might hear him if he wailed. The flight of stairs between them was short, but she regretted that the two rooms weren't on one floor. She sat by the window and watched the common fade, until the moon rose. And then Mrs. Purdie shut out the moon and brought in a malodorous lamp and the supper.

"I'd clean forgot about *you* sitting in the dark! You must holler out if you want anything, my dear. There, I've got a nice bit o' steak for you! It's caught a bit just 'ere"—she drew a deprecating and dirty finger over half of it—"but it's beautiful and tender." The finger was poked into the middle of the steak three times.

Silence surprised her; she said, "You're feeling a bit done up after your journey, p'raps? Your supper 'll do you good."

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"I don't think," said Betty, very faintly, "that I am hungry; I think I'd like a biscuit instead."

"You didn't say nothing yesterday about getting biscuits, did you? Still, it's only at the corner; I daresay I can run out for you directly. Anything you want to be comfortable—you've only got to say. What would you like—an arrowroot?"

"Any kind will do, thank you—whatever they keep. Oh, and Mrs. Purdie, I should like some towels, please. Don't take them up now—you might wake him. I'll take them myself when I go to bed, if you'll give them to me."

"There's a towel up there," said the woman, staring. "You don't want another, do you?"

"Why, yes! One towel between Baby and me isn't very convenient."

"Well, I dunno." She considered. "Mrs. Wright says that one towel to each room is all that can be expected. It's all Mrs. Wright's in the 'abit of giving, and *she's* been letting this ten years. . . . Well, there! what's the odds? You shall have another. Have it, my dear, and feel at 'ome! Now, don't leave the steak like that—you draw up and make a good supper, do!"

But she couldn't look at the steak, and the grocer's was shut, so she supped on bread and what was called "butter." Sounds indicated that

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Mrs. Purdie and the anæmic children supped about ten o'clock on the contents of a tin. The typical Englishwoman of the lower middle class is the stupidest thing on two legs; she spends her life in a kitchen without learning the rudiments of cookery, and she has a baby every year without learning the first rules for rearing a child.

"Ducksums," said Betty next day, after uneatable bacon, "this place is impossible. We've made a blunder, and the sooner we recognise it the better. Never waste time, Richard—we don't get much. That's a motto from your American mother! What we have to decide is how we're to find other rooms. I can't leave you behind, and your carriage is no good without a girl to wheel it—and you can't travel around the county on my back. My son, take your soother out of your mouth, and attend to business!"

"Momma!" said the baby. It was his vocabulary.

"That's so—it's for momma to do! Well, we'll go to the first store that sells newspapers, and see what the advertisements have to tell us. We'll rest on the seats if momma's arms get tired."

But the local paper was exhibited among the baskets of boots and tins of condensed milk at the corner, so there was no need to rest with him on a seat.

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She unpacked her writing-case and some of his toys, and forced up the window as high as it would go; and put the bed pillows on the linoleum floor, for him to play upon. (The horsehair couch boasted only a horse-hair bolster.) When he consented to spare her, she spread the newspaper on the scarlet tablecover, and studied the Apartments column.

Eureka! One advertisement had been framed to meet her wants.

"Quaint, attractive sitting-room and bedroom, with attendance (silent) offered in farmhouse, at nominal terms. Pure air, exquisite scenery. Peace within and without. J. M., Mulberry Farm, Atherall, near Hammick, Tunbridge Wells."

She wrote to "J. M." eagerly, and carried "Ducksums" to the pillar box.

During the next two days he took the air on the nearest bench, and her mainstay was new-laid eggs, which a tradesman "obliged her with." Then came a reply signed "John Mellish." Mr. Mellish stated that the rent would be fifteen shillings a week—"undistorted; I have acquired no skill in vitiating my agreements by the addition of 'Extras.'" He did not keep a maid-servant, but his niece acted for him as working housekeeper. If Mrs. Keith would graciously make an

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appointment to view the rooms, a trap should meet her at Hammick Station.

So she made an appointment. And she had to hire a fly from the Unicorn at a cost of two shillings to take her and "Ducksums" into Tunbridge Wells. But on the Hammick platform was Mr. Mellish.

"Mrs. Keith?"

She saw a spare man, with a shock of silver hair and a threadbare velveteen jacket. As he swept off his hat, his finger-nails testified that his labour on the farm was practical; but the clean-shaven, ascetic face suggested the study, not the soil.

"I have to apologise," he said, lifting the baby into the trap, "for my niece's absence—she was summoned to town to-day. But I have done my best; a friend of ours, a lady from Crowborough, will show you over the place. And my niece returns to-night, so the rooms would be available whenever you cared to come."

"I'd like to come to-morrow, if I come at all," said Betty. "I'm sorry to hear I can't see your niece, though; so much depends on the—I shall be so much dependent on her."

"You'll find her a very tactful and willing woman, I assure you. If you speak to her, she will answer intelligently; if you don't address her,

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she will be quiet. You may think I am exaggerating, if you have had any lengthy experience of apartments, but my niece can positively clear your dinner-table without jarring your nerves."

"It sounds very nice," she said. "I hope my little son won't make too much noise for your own nerves."

"Ah," said Mr. Mellish—his gestures were courtly—"I was alluding to 'noise'—a child's voice is music. That reminds me! I must warn you that I sometimes play in the evening; the piano, which is a poor thing, would be audible in your room. I don't know if you would object to that?"

"Oh, a piano wouldn't disturb me at all."

"I am so relieved. Not that I play often; I have no time. Nor, for that matter, have I any gift—as an instrumentalist." He waited for her to ask a question, but as she did not, he added, "I simply strum my compositions for my own pleasure; I seldom presume to mar the work of other men."

"You compose?" she exclaimed. "Now is that so? That is very interesting."

"Oh!" Having dragged the fact in, his gesture dismissed it as beneath mention. He descanted on music in general. There was apparently no composer living, or dead, in whose work he was

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not steeped. He condemned, he extolled, he advanced new and—he informed her—"revolutionary" theories. How much of his oration was brilliance, and how much of it sheer eccentricity, she was unable to judge; but if the boy had not become restive before they reached the house, she would have thought it worth while taking the journey merely to meet so remarkable a farmer.

And, compared with the scarlet tablecover and the horse-hair couch, the rooms were ideal. A little shabbier than she had expected, perhaps, but relatively a discovery and a joy. She wished while the visitor was showing them to her that she were installed in them already. And afterwards Mr. Mellish gave them tea, and heated some milk for the baby—a distinguished figure, entering in the velveteen jacket, with the saucepan. It was very restful at tea; it was blessed to feel that her escape from Fuchsia Terrace was planned. Her thankfulness was deep, in the basket-chair overlooking the orchard.

"Then it is understood?" he asked, during the drive back; "we may expect you to-morrow—or shall we say 'Saturday'?"

"Well, I'm anxious to get out of my present place immediately, Mr. Mellish. Still, if to-morrow wouldn't be convenient to you——"

"I've been thinking that another day would

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give my niece more time to have everything in order for you," he explained, "that is all." Yet he seemed anxious that she should agree to Saturday, so she did so.

He begged her to let them have a postcard that the trap might be waiting. He murmured final hopes that she would be very comfortable, and went with her into the station. She had only "taken apartments." It sounded a trivial thing; it would have sounded trivial to herself the previous week; but the woman who foresaw a long year in apartments hugged her baby close, as the train started, and thanked Heaven to have "found a home."

Mrs. Purdie was incapable of crediting the news. That the lady—or any other lady—could wish to leave her, she regarded as impossible.

"I am going," repeated Betty, "that is all I have to say. You have had my notice."

"Now don't you talk nonsense, my dear!" said Mrs. Purdie, emphatically cheerful. "*You'll* be all right when you've shaken down, don't you worry about *that!*"

And if misgivings assailed her later, she hid them with rare art. Her buoyancy did not desert her till that wet Saturday morning, when the cot was again sewn in its canvas wrappings, and she

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had been into the bedroom and beheld the trunks strapped. Then she complained.

She said, "You know you took the rooms telling me you was going to be here for months. I expected to have you right through the summer, you know!"

"Well, you can't expect me to stay if I don't want to? I didn't pledge myself to stay a day longer than it suited me, did I?"

"I don't know nothing about that," said Mrs. Purdie. "Mrs. Wright says it's a 'very 'eavy loss, and you ought to make it up to me'—she says she never heard the like! Mrs. Wright says I ought to 'ave four months' money off you."

"Well, you can tell Mrs. Wright you didn't get it," said Betty.

"Oh, well!" She produced the bill. "Come on, there you are! I've charged you a week's money, instead of notice—you can't grumble at that, can you? I don't suppose you can afford to pay no more?"

"That's so," said Betty, "I can't afford to pay so much. But I know that's just. There's a pen, Mrs. Purdie—will you kindly give me a receipt?"

And then the cab from the Unicorn ground on the pebbles, and the trunks were bumped down the narrow stairs.

The rain pelted, and the changes to-day were

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numerous, and the porters were dolts. But though she missed the nurse in every moment, she was not discouraged. She was bound for the quaint, attractive rooms, and the tactful woman, and the silent service. "With an orchard, Ducksums!" she said. "Think of the orchard when the sun shines!"

The sight of Mr. Mellish was as welcome as if he had been an old friend.

"We've got here at last!" she exclaimed. "How d'ye do?"

But somehow Mr. Mellish was less enthusiastic now.

"I am sorry," he said, clearing his throat, "to have to tell you, Mrs. Keith, that unfortunately there has been a little difficulty since I had your card—quite a temporary difficulty, a hitch! My niece has been delayed in town."

She stood staring at him on the wet platform, with the baby in her arms, and the trunks, and the bassinette, and the perambulator strewn round her.

"Well, it was your duty to telegraph to me!" she cried. "What do you imagine I am going to do, arriving at the edge of the world, with nowhere to go?"

"I have arranged for that, I have arranged for that," he said hurriedly. "I have taken rooms

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for you in the meanwhile—just for a week. I am sure, for a week, you won't mind putting up with them? Pear Cottage is primitive, but you will find the people very kindly, very kindly, and you'll pay only twelve shillings there. They quite understand the position; I have explained."

"Oh!" It was a relief to learn that there would be a roof to shelter her. "Well, please give the address to the porter—I don't think all these things will go in the trap."

She persuaded the porter to follow at once, but she was very disappointed and very vexed; and as Mr. Mellish touched up the mare, she said, "Can you assure me that it *will* be only for a week? I can't undertake to wait indefinitely."

"A week precisely!" he declared. "To-day a week the rooms'll be vacant again, and she'll have come back."

"Oh!" said Betty. "You have let the rooms to somebody else, then, after letting them to me?"

He looked embarrassed.

"Just for a week," he admitted. "Because my niece could not return—merely for that reason. The present occupants are a gentleman and his wife—to them her absence is no drawback. To you, of course, it is—er—necessary that a woman should be living on the premises. So, in the mean-

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time, having this offer—quite unexpectedly—I let the rooms."

She suspected that he had let them because the gentleman and his wife were more profitable, but he was so extremely courteous, and so highly talented, that she was reluctant to think ill of him.

She was reluctant to think ill of him even when she saw the make-shift. Opposite the farm gate, across a patch of ragged grass, a little dilapidated cottage dripped among vegetables. The broken path was a rivulet; the door opened into a kitchen; its floor was bricks.

"Where is the parlour?" she asked. But it was a reproach rather than a query; already she knew that there was no parlour.

"You will have this practically to yourself," he said deprecatingly. "The accommodation is very limited in Atherall, of course, or I would have done better for you. But during the week you will have this practically to yourself—the Duplocks will leave it to you as much as possible. I expect Mrs. Duplock is busy at the back with the poultry—if you will excuse me, I'll call her in!"

She came in as he spoke, a gaunt, hard-featured woman, weather-beaten, and bowed with outdoor toil.

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"'Afternoon, sir."

"This is the lady, Mrs. Duplock."

"'Afternoon, marm."

"I've told Mrs. Keith that you will make her as comfortable as you can while she's with you. They are bringing her luggage up. Oh"—he turned to Betty—"Saturday is a bad day for meat in the village; will you allow me to send you in one of my fowls for dinner to-morrow? And I have a modest library—if you will let me lend you some books, they might help to pass your time."

"Thank you very much," she murmured, "it's very kind of you. Perhaps Mrs. Duplock will show me my room? I want to change my child's clothes directly the things come—I'm afraid of his taking cold."

"Then I'll leave you now. But if there's anything more I can do to—to repair the unfortunate occurrence, pray give me the privilege. Mrs. Duplock will come across at any moment that you wish to send to me, I'm sure."

"Thank you very much," she said again, and Mrs. Duplock led the way to a bedroom.

"This bean't the one for you and the little 'un," she said, with a broad drawl, "this be mine and my husband's." A second door, with a bobbin latch, opened out of it. "This be yours."

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"Oh!" faltered Betty. "I have to pass through your room to go to my own?"

"Yes, but we shan't mind, because we shan't be here; we're up before five in the mornings. And I expect you go to bed betimes?"

"What do you call 'betimes'?" She was tearing off the damp pelisse.

"Well, I suppose you won't be later than a quarter to nine?" A four-poster nearly monopolised the floor, and she thumped the mountainous bedding with a proud fist. "You'll lay on two of the finest feather beds in the village, marm! They was my mother's before me. And *her* mother's before that. More than thirty children have been born on this bed. And nine folks have been laid out on it."

When the porter arrived, the trunks couldn't be coaxed up the staircase, so Betty unpacked necessaries in the kitchen. A wood fire burnt there cheerfully. She cut the stitches in the canvas wrapping with a knife that she found in the scullery, and aired the baby's sheets and blankets before the blaze. Mrs. Duplock helped her to carry the bassinette, and to erect it between the historic bed and a box, which served for a wardrobe and a chest of drawers.

It was a very grubby Betty who washed at an elementary washhand-stand, with mottled soap.

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Tea was sustaining, and "Ducksums" evinced a lively interest in the chickens that ran about the kitchen. At last, when she had put him into his little night-shirt, she went down to the fire again, and was invited to the wooden arm-chair with a chintz cushion. She put her feet on the fender, and wondered at being there. Dusk gathered. The cabbages through the window silvered, and grew vague. Mrs. Duplock lit a feeble lamp, and ironed some washing on the table. Her husband came in heavily—even gaunter than she, older, still more weather-beaten—bent double beneath a load. He pulled off his cap first, and slid the barley-meal to the ground. It struck the bricks with a thud that told its weight.

"'Evening, marm." His trembling hand wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Good-evening, Mr. Duplock," she said.

"I'm doo-ing your shirt, Joe," said the woman.

"So I se-e."

He said no more. He sat on a chair just inside the door, and unlaced his boots. Betty felt that her presence constrained him; it occurred to her, with new pity, that the kitchen was these people's home, and that the inconvenience was not hers alone. But that eggs were to be boiled soon for her supper, she would have gone to bed at once.

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Still the pair were dumb. She stole another glance at him, and then—it was the weary resignation of his legs—she knew that timidity was not his only trouble; she realised that the man was dog-tired from his shoulders to his feet, and that she was in his chair.

"Why, Mr. Duplock, I beg your pardon!" she exclaimed, rising. "Please go and sit there!"

He looked at her, abashed.

"I wouldn't think of it, marm."

"But it's your place, you know it is."

He stammered. "As to that——"

"You go and sit there right away," she said, "where you can be comfortable."

They changed seats—the man sheepish, tongue-tied; and his wife turned her grey head an instant from her ironing.

Away over the fields a clock chimed nine as Betty undressed in the room without a wardrobe, or a chest of drawers, or a key. But "Ducksums" was sleeping like a top, and after she had blown out the candle, almost the next thing she knew was that she had slept sound herself.

When she was called, the sky was fair, and the Duplocks had long since breakfasted. After they came back from church, she sat down to dinner with them. No reference was made to the arrangement, but the social barrier that the cot-

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tagers had drawn across their kitchen table left them little space to move. For them and their boiled bacon and cabbage, one narrow end; for the gentry and the fowl, the rest!

Betty said, "Why, I think some of this fowl would go very well with your bacon, Mrs. Duplock, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, well, then," said Mrs. Duplock, "you must accept a bit of our bacon with your fowl."

But Mr. Mellish's offering proved to be so tough that it was no good to anybody, and Betty dined on bacon and cabbage.

"I'm glad I 'invited' you before I began to carve!" she laughed; "I didn't know we couldn't eat it, did I?"

"As if such a lady as you-u would do a thing like that!" said Mr. Duplock devoutly. They were the only words he had spoken since he asked a blessing.

She found the three-pronged fork difficult to use, and tried hard not to mortify them by awkwardness. Her host and hostess were extremely cramped, and they tried, with fine courtesy, to conceal their discomfort.

She began to respect the Duplocks. She proceeded to like them. It was in a very deprecatory voice that she said on Tuesday morning to the woman:

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"Mrs. Duplock, Baby is being eaten up—the room must be in a terrible state. I'm sure you don't know it."

"Oh, there now!" said Mrs. Duplock, "the poor lamb! But, marm, they come from the chickens —it bean't what you think, indeed it bean't!"

"I don't think it's—it's what I think if you tell me it isn't," said Betty. "But he's been tearing himself to pieces all night. I don't know what I'm to do!"

"Of course this is not right for you, I know it ain't. But don't think there's any want o' soap-and-water in the place, marm, I kearn't bear you to think that—it's all them chickens. And I'm going to get something off my mi-ind!" She was peeling potatoes outside the window, and she banged the knife-handle on the sill. "I'd no right to 've asked twelve shillings from you—and what's more, I bean't going to take it! But he told me you was a lady who'd pay anything I asked."

"What? Mr. Mellish told you that?"

"Yes. It's not fit for you—if I'd known the sort you was, I dursen't have took you. All we take is holiday children."

"Don't *they* object to the—the chickens?"

"Lor bless you, they've got worse than that where they come from! That's all we take—holi-

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day children for five shillings, and we feed 'em for it besides. I do feel ashamed of having im posed on you—I don't forget how you gave up his chair to my old man when he come in tired You go down to the village and get a lotion fo the little 'un—*I'll* watch 'im while you're gone as safe as if he was my own. It's all them chick ens, marm, but how you're to put up with i for a fortnight, I dunno!"

"Only for a week, Mrs. Duplock, not a fort night."

"Mr. Mellish, he told us you'd be here for a fortnight."

"Oh, did he?" said Betty, her eyes darkening "I didn't know, that's news to me! Well, I'll b very glad to accept your offer."

As she crossed the road, he came out to gree her. She had not seen him since her arrival, s subduing her temper, she began very formally—

"I have to thank you for the book you sen across, Mr. Mellish—and for the fowl."

"Oh," his gesture was airy, "a trifle, nothin —three and sixpence! I'm glad to see you, Mrs Keith—I have to plead for your forbearance The people with me have just asked to stay fo another week. Naturally, the terms I am re ceiving from them are higher than those I aske

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from you. Now, will you convenience me by remaining at the cottage for one week longer?"

"I am sorry," she said, "but I do not find it a fair proposal."

"Oh, you mustn't say that," he exclaimed. "I am not accustomed to be told I am unfair! I presume I have the right to let my own apartments to the best advantage? In any case," the gestures were more vehement, "my niece cannot be with me till then, so I can't receive you till then. I must ask you to wait till Saturday week. Our arrangement has depended on my niece's return—I must hold you to our arrangement!"

There was the contingency of her being unable to find any other rooms sooner—the risk that plain speaking might condemn her to the chickens for a longer term still. She recognised it, wrathful as she was—and decided to keep the farm door open till she was in a position to slam it.

"W-e-ll, it'll be rather inconvenient for me," she murmured, assuming weakness.

He took leave of her, vain of his mastery.

"Mrs. Duplock," she volleyed, when she went in with the lotion, "I don't go to the farm, for five minutes, if I can help myself. But I can't stay here. Now I want somewhere to live—and you must find it for me. Nothing on this earth

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will drive me into that man's house except the chickens at the last moment!"

Mrs. Duplock had never heard an American at high speed before; she looked breathless.

"Well, I haven't liked to speak, marm," she said, "but Mr. Mellish bean't liked in the village —he do some rare shabby things."

"Where's his niece? Is there a niece at all?"

"Yes, he's got a niece, but she hasn't been here for four months." She added impartially, "Maybe he has hopes to get her back, you know!"

"Mrs. Duplock, what am I to do? I must have other rooms. Where am I to go? I don't know how to find them. You don't know how hard it is to find lodgings to live in. I feel as if I had been travelling round Kent for years!"

"You poor lamb," said Mrs. Duplock, "begging your pardon! But there be nothing fit for you in Atherall—you'd best go to Hammick."

"Can you tell me of anything there?"

"I dunno no one I could exactly recommend you to in Hammick. If it had been Rusthall now, I could have told you of a ni-ice place. But I suppose Rusthall's too far for you?"

"Why, Rusthall is what I'd like best; that's where I've come from! But I didn't see any 'nice place.'"

"I've heard of ladies being very satisfied at

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Mrs. Hyder's. And I'm told you get what you pay for with her."

"Is she dear?" asked Betty. "I can't afford more than fifteen shillings a week."

"Well, I can't say. I expect Mrs. Hyder'd want a tidy sum. If you'd like to go and see it, and don't want to take the little 'un so far, I can do with 'im. It's the 'ouse in the 'ollow, agen the poplars."

And when she had interviewed Mrs. Hyder, Betty was confident of being comfortable there. Her relief had been intense when Mrs. Hyder abated a half-crown and said, "Well, for such a long while, we'll say fifteen shillings, then!" The sitting-room was tiny—the ground-floor "drawing-room" was already let, and for double the terms—and she overlooked the kitchen garden, instead of the lawn. But the window opened on to a ladder staircase, and below there was a little red path, just wide enough for one, dividing the vegetables from the pink and white apple and plum trees.

She returned to the cottage rejoicing. This time, Mrs. Duplock stitched the cot in the canvas. Mrs. Duplock said her "old man would drive the lady to the station in their cart on the morrow." Mrs. Duplock received the fortnight's rent that

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she had been led to expect—and cried when she took it.

"It don't seem right," she quavered, "it don't indeed! But it'd be going agen Providence to refuse twelve shillings, wouldn't it, when you're that good as to offer it? Us with another bird dead only last night!" Two large tears trickled down her bony nose. "Me and Duplock be going to see you safe into the train, marm. We've been talking of it over—when Mr. Mellish hears what you mean to do, I dunno, what he'll say, I'm su-ure!"

And, their work sacrificed, the couple appeared next morning as a bodyguard. The man had put on a jacket. The woman wore her best clothes, to sit beside the "gentry." A pink rose brightened the antique bonnet; the watchful, hard-featured face was framed in ribbons of the ancient brown which Fashion's wheel was to make *chic* a few months later.

Not till the car was at the door did Betty announce her intention to Mr. Mellish. He was grooming his mare as she crossed the road, and she called to him over the gate.

"I have brought the book you kindly lent me," she said, when he came out, "and the three and sixpence. I have to wish you 'good-day.' I am just going."

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He looked beyond her to the cart, and gasped —an excited figure on the ragged grass-plot.

"Going? What do you mean?' he stuttered. "You can't go—you mustn't leave me in the lurch like this! What do you mean?"

"It's very simple; I mean I have taken other apartments."

"Oh, ho, ho!" he said violently. "We shall soon see if it's so simple! You'll find it's not so simple as you think. You have engaged my rooms; I don't allow you to break a contract. I have my claim!"

The Duplocks stood close at hand, apprehensive and alert, the woman holding the baby.

"Will you please put the baggage in, Mr. Duplock?" said Betty, turning.

"You are not going!" declaimed Mr. Mellish, with dramatic gesticulation. "Even at this eleventh hour, madam, you do not go. The rooms have been reserved at your request; I'm a man of business, I'll have my rights, I'll not be robbed!"

His gestures were so uncontrolled that for a moment she lost her nerve and was mute. Then she threw up her chin and fronted him steadily.

"Mr. Mellish," she said, "when you have done screaming, let us understand each other! You let your rooms to me by a falsehood about your

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niece. And you delayed me till Saturday because you had a chance of doing better in the meantime. And when the other chance came off, you asked me to wait your convenience in a kitchen. Do you imagine I have arrived here from a kindergarten?"

"Oh," he shouted, "they may be common people, but they will do all they can, and——"

"They are not common people, they are much superior to you, but their house is not suitable."

"You are not going!" he stormed. He beat the book on his palm under her face. "Mark that!"

"There is just one thing that might detain me," she said through her teeth. "If the hand you are brandishing happens to touch me, I shall remain to give you in charge of the village policeman. Now out of my way, Mr. Mellish—and the next time you hope to cheat a woman because she hasn't her husband with her, don't choose an American!"

Then she climbed on to the plank in the cart, beside the brown bonnet-strings and the rose. And Mrs. Duplock, giving "Ducksums" to her, said, "Lor, marm, there was one moment when you looked as if you was standing up dead!"

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CHAPTER XXI

It was peaceful, overlooking the plum-trees. After Fuchsia Terrace, and the kitchen, there was much to be said for the abode. She surprised herself soon, in this tiny room, by feeling so grateful for it. "Ducksums" did not give her much time to be idle during the day, and there was no piano for brief respites, nor were there books for the evening. But the red path by the fruit bloom was pleasant, and there was a seat near the crocuses on the little lawn.

Mrs. Hyder recommended a gawky girl in a pinafore, from the vicinity of the Toad Rock, to push the perambulator, and Betty bought a new sixpenny-halfpenny hat for her, and walked beside her twice a day over the common. The Happy Valley was still there—and the favourite nook was again favoured. The girl and "Ducksums" didn't see them, but the spot where they sat was full of memories. Last time there had been no "Ducksums."

Ignorant of such reflections, he waved his hand to a far meadow, sprinkled with white lambs.

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In this new life, where her only companions were her baby boy, and Queenie from the Toad Rock, Betty found herself taking an interest in her fellow-lodger. Attention was first drawn to her by peals of laughter in the garden between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, and the ladder staircase had yielded a view of a young girl playing hide-and-seek with a child about twelve years old. Between six o'clock and seven, however, the young girl was discovered to be a very pretty woman, and she had brought out a work-basket and was mending things. The absorption with which she mended things was so great a change from the merriment with which she played hide-and-seek, that Betty looked at her astonished. After supper, there had been another glimpse of her, through the drawing-room window—the lamplight showed her, with a furrowed brow, nibbling a penholder at a table strewn with papers.

Curiosity in the chameleon ascertained that she was the child's mother, and "an authoress," and that her name was "Mrs. Norbury."

Every morning Betty saw Mrs. Norbury leave the house with her little daughter swinging a school-satchel. The length of time that she was gone suggested that the school was in Tunbridge Wells. Every afternoon she went out to bring

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the child back, and in the interval the table had been strewn with papers again. Betty observed that the main features of the programme never varied. At half-past four, a music lesson. From five to six, the games. From six to seven, the work-basket. After supper, once more the pen!

What kind of woman was this who lived like a machine, and could romp like a young girl?

One afternoon "Ducksums" introduced them. He was learning to stand, and exaggerating his stability, and Mrs. Norbury picked him off the daisies. The little girl, it transpired, had been on tiptoe for a week to "know the baby," and the women talked while they watched them.

"What a pretty little frock that is!" remarked Betty.

Mrs. Norbury beamed.

"Do you think so, really? I *am* glad. I had to run it up for her in a couple of days."

"You don't mean to say you made that yourself?"

"That? Yes, and all her others too! I make everything she wears—except her shoes and stockings."

Betty opened amazed eyes at her.

"Are you sure you quite believe me?" said the prodigy, laughing.

"Why, yes, of course," laughed Betty. "I was

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only wondering what your frightful fault can be."

The other woman looked puzzled.

"You seem too perfect to be true."

At this, the prodigy blushed as brightly as if she had been seventeen.

"But it's so simple if you know how," she said. "The only difficulty is to find the time."

"Well, so I should say, seeing that you write as well. I don't know how you do so much—I've been wondering ever since I came."

"I've really got it easier now than I've ever had it before!—I mean, than I've ever had it since my husband died. I've done everything for Muriel since then, and she used to be delicate."

"She's all right now, isn't she?"

"Oh yes! The sea air and the country have done just what we hoped—we left town when she was five. But till we came to this place, she was only allowed to go to school in the morning—I had scarcely taken her when it was time to go and fetch her. That *was* rather whizzling. You see, I never write in front of her; it'd be bad for the work, and—what's more important still—it'd be bad for the child to have a dummy mother driving a pen. Besides, I have to bring her up."

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"But she seems such a good little thing—there can't be much 'bringing up' to do?"

"Good?" said the other, in a deep, hushed voice —she sounded as if she were saying prayers. "Yes. She makes me feel ashamed sometimes. But there's the good to be helped along, and the failings to be 'thrown out of the window.' She and I work together at that. We 'throw another failing out of the window' every term." The smile that lit her face was very girlish.

This year, the English climate was even more eccentric than usual, but when the sky was kind and the ground was dry, the women met nearly every afternoon in the play hour. Sometimes Betty joined in the games and romped with the best. And when the Easter holidays began, she often took Muriel for walks with Queenie and "Ducksums," and left the mother free at the table.

By the time the hyacinths and tulips came up, the women were good friends. Mrs. Norbury, it seemed, always sauntered in the garden for ten minutes after her evening's work.

"Why don't you come out too?"

"I don't like to go so far away from Baby, for fear he wakes."

So, in future, Mrs. Norbury always sauntered to the kitchen garden instead, and they generally

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sat and talked on the ladder staircase under the open window.

Betty learnt that her pen provided her only income, and that she had ambitions, and no prospect of fulfilling them.

"I can't afford to go in for the kind of work I'd love," she explained once, as they nibbled chocolate on the steps together; "I couldn't educate Muriel, I couldn't do anything by it!"

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, I've had two little plays produced in London. The second one did me a lot of good, so far as kudos goes; all the best-known dramatic critics gave it really magnificent notices, with a single exception—*he* dismissed it with a sneer. But I didn't make any money by it—and the other stuff keeps us. I'm not proud of being a serial writer, but we've got to live."

"I think you ought to be very proud indeed. *I'd* be very proud if I could do what you're doing. *I* have about twopence a week to live on, and I'm spending twopence-halfpenny." She sighed. "And I can't earn a cent. Anyhow, what's the professional distinction between writing serials and writing novels?"

"Mrs. Keith! A serial is pot-boiling, and a novel's a book."

"Oh, I see! Every long story that hasn't cloth

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covers is a 'pot-boiler'; and every long story that has, is called a 'novel.' I say, I do wish you'd give me a few hints—I want to flatten my expenses a little. The Hyders are quite fair, I think; but I don't seem to do as well as I ought. Do you go to the tradespeople yourself?"

"Not unless I'm obliged to. And it doesn't matter here. Perhaps you don't order so well as you might."

"How do you mean? I order a joint, and eat it cold till I'm sick of seeing it."

"Oh, my dear! But of course, I know—I used to live like that myself! If you like, I'll show you my week's bills—then you'll see just what I do."

"You *are* a trump!" exclaimed Betty. "I'd shine that way in no time. But I expect you cater more extensively than I do, you know—you spend a lot on frocks, too, don't you?"

"Good gracious, no!" But she looked highly delighted. "I make most of them myself. Why, your mourning must have cost I don't know how much!"

"Oh, well," said Betty, "but I don't go to the same places now. I know I'm always seeing you in new things."

"Not new ones. I turn them, and bring a blouse up to date, when I've time."

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"For pity's sake, how do you bring a blouse up to date?"

"Why, the sleeves chiefly—it's the sleeves that are always changing. See this muslin thing!" She laughed gleefully. "This'll be its fourth summer. The sleeves hung wide at the wrists the first year. I turn them upside down the next—took the wide ends up to the shoulder, and puffed it down to the elbow, and added a fitting lace sleeve to the wrist. Last year, I only had to throw away the lace half and stick on a frill. This year, I stuck on an embroidery cuff instead."

Betty contemplated the stars.

"And next?" she faltered.

"Next year I shall take the skirt, and what's left of the blouse, and make a sweet little frock, all frills, for Muriel."

"You are a liberal education!" said Betty, after a long pause. "You may have a piece more chocolate. When may I come and study those bills of yours?"

And there was nothing, even the science of economy, that Betty wasn't capable of mastering if she bent her mind to it.

Another scene; after the scarlet runners flowered. In this scene Mrs. Norbury's Frightful

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Fault was revealed, and Betty received an Astounding Object Lesson.

It was announced that Mrs. Norbury was going to spend twelve pounds on clothes, all at once.

"But I thought you made all your things yourself, Madge?"

"Now, that's a nice accusation!" complained the other. "I told you I made 'most of them.' So I do—and I pat myself on the back when they're done, and while I'm wearing them. But —*but,* dear—once a year I give myself a treat."

"The creature's human," said Betty.

"I go shopping up West with fifteen pounds —when I've managed to save it. And I get one good, well-cut costume. Of course, no furbelows—it's the cut that gives me the unholy joy, because I know I'm properly dressed. Then there must be a hat to go with it—the gloves, the silk petticoat, the shoes, the stockings, just a complete rig-out, to feel happy when I call on friends in town, and to impress the editors. Now, here are some patterns! What are they wearing? And where do you think I can cut down the prices on this list? Do help me, Betty! this year I've only got twelve pounds to fly with."

Betty, as adviser upon "cutting down the prices"! It was quickly evident that there was

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no experience to be drawn upon. But goodwill she had, and her acute intelligence, and the thirst to learn—the dominating purpose that was already dwarfing hardships and re-creating her. And with all her brain she worked. Both women worked—for an anxious hour and a half—reducing, debating, despairing. And finally they leant back in their chairs with triumphant smiles, for they had solved the problem with eleven pounds nineteen and sixpence!

When they separated, the other woman, who realised that her friend must have once shopped lavishly, said, "You *have* been a brick! I'm afraid my trumpery purchases must have bored you no end."

And the experience had taught her so much that, for once in her life, Betty stood without words for a reply. She simply shook her head at the other woman, and kissed her.

From Lynch personally she had heard nothing since she wrote giving him this address; there had merely been the necessary acknowledgment from his lawyer. Nor among the notices of the art exhibitions had she been able to find any picture of her husband's mentioned. But for a solitary letter from Dardy, it was as if the world had been left behind. The stir of a village woke her to her child; the scent of the earth gave her

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greeting when she rose; the night wind whispering in the fruit trees was her lullaby.

Not once had she repented the choice that she had made. She had had to struggle hard in these three months, but the struggle had been to eke out her means, never to sustain her resolve. She knew no temptation to abandon it. The sun broke upon it and the sun set upon it, and the moon idealised it, dauntless and unquenchable.

And, thanks to friendship, the struggle had grown less. By slow degrees it had become needless for her to consult daily the items and prices that were her lesson books. And by slower degrees the consciousness of poverty ceased to oppress her. There were many hours in which enjoyment was supreme. Not the hours in which she trudged beside the scarecrow hireling, abject to all beholders; but hours of a mother's duties, and of a woman's rest—when the flare of the scarlet runners had paled in the twilight—hours of a mother's worship. It was sweet terror to strain towards his tottering feet—breathless, to clutch at him, exultant, when he had almost reached her. It was a new miracle to mark the dawn of another word upon his lips, and teach him the word that he was to say to Keith.

Under the window the plums turned purple. The earliest apples ripened. And "Ducksums,"

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defying the two pounds a week, had grown out of all his petticoats.

Mrs. Norbury viewed a heap of them in Betty's room one day, and said, "Why, you've got enough here for half a dozen children—you don't need to buy any stuff at all! You can chop some of these up to make the alterations."

"Is that so? Well, that's just lovely! But I'm such a duffer, I don't know the way," exclaimed Betty. And the next moment she stared at the landlady's daughter approaching with an orange-coloured envelope in her hand.

"Regret to inform you your father passed away last night from heart failure. No pain. By his instructions, funeral must take place at Greenwood within five days, rendering your attendance impossible. I place my services entirely at your disposal. Please cable your wishes, and accept my sincerest condolence.—DORFMAN.

"Bad news?" asked Mrs. Norbury.

"My father's dead," said Betty chokily.

And her head went down on the other woman's shoulder, and they sat so for a long time without a word.

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CHAPTER XXII

By-and-by she sent a reply, begging the lawyer to act for her in her absence. She cabled from the little telegraph office next door to the hotel where she had once spent such blindly happy weeks. But she shrank from appealing to him about the flowers that she wished laid on the grave. About those she cabled to Dardy.

On the morrow came another message, assuring her that all should be done as the dead man had desired; and after that was silence.

Mrs. Norbury had said, "You'll want to go away? You know you can leave Baby with me?"

"I'm sure you'd let me. But I shan't be going away—my father was in America; I couldn't get there in time. I feel so awful!"

"I'm sorry."

"We weren't friends—that makes it worse."

"Poor girl!"

"I'm afraid you must think sometimes I'm very reserved with you—I daresay you've wondered? But I can't talk about my affairs. It

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isn't that I'm not fond of you, Madge, but I can't!"

"I've never thought anything of the kind. I haven't wondered at all, except——"

"Except what?"

"Well, you told me your husband was alive—I've wondered sometimes whether you got on together."

"No, that's right; we didn't get on together. But it wasn't his fault. My father was a rich man, and my husband wasn't—and I was extravagant. That was the trouble. But I'm going to do better next time! That's why I want to know things; I don't want to be such a useless fool any more."

They were anxious days that followed, and the silent evenings were heavier still. Brooding in the little lamp-lit room, or pacing the narrow path in the darkness, she faced one overwhelming question. The fear of the millions, of the vastness of their responsibility, weighted her soul. "You'll be one of the richest women on earth!" She quailed at the thought. All her ambitions were absorbed by her plan for happiness and home—she prayed to escape the burden of this complication in her life.

Her mind groped among conjectures. Dick must have read of the death; he pictured her

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in New York still! But if this mountain of wealth descended on her? Then she could no longer be economising unknown in a village; the Press of America and Europe would flame with her relinquishment. Must he learn her whereabouts then? Would he come to her?

She said to her friend at last, "I wish I could alter those things we were talking about—it'd give me something to do in the evening." And while she trembled before the magnitude of the inheritance, she took a lesson in lengthening her baby's clothes.

"Not so fast," she pleaded. "Show me. I want to see how you do it, I want to learn."

And it was, "All right; I'll cut out a pattern of the bodice. . . . Now lay it on the material—I should think three inches all round would do for him. Now stick in the pins. . . . Now cut. Not so close—you've got to think of the turnings!"

Then, hindering the thought of the "turnings," the news of the millions flashed.

A reference to the funeral; next, "By the will you inherit everything your father possessed, which I estimate to have a value of two hundred million dollars. Your presence desirable. I await your instructions.—DORFMAN."

Forty million pounds!

Two Continents were talking of her. Crowned

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Heads would flatter her. The world would prostrate itself before her feet. The woman gazed over the kitchen garden with her child's mending in her hand.

The work was postponed: "We'll do it after tea, Madge, if you can spare the time."

She was left to her thoughts, and to her answer. For days a word had eluded her. "Distribute?" No. She borrowed a dictionary, and read under D until "Disintegrate" leapt out.

"Ducksums" played beside her while she scribbled, while she discarded sheets of paper.

The cablegram was written. She read it through, her baby scrambling in her lap—

"Make immediate formal request on my behalf to President of United States, to nominate Committee for the purpose of administering the whole of my father's fortune to such Charities, American and European, as they think deserving. I stipulate that the whole be disposed of within two years. My unalterable intention is that the fortune be disintegrated, and my desire is as far as possible to benefit all those who have suffered in the process of its amassment. With these exceptions: Pay promptly ten thousand pounds to Joe Duplock, Pear Cottage, Atherall, near Hammick, Tunbridge Wells. Fifty thousand pounds

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to Nurse Emery, Fernando Prospect Sanatorium, the nurse who attended my brother daily during my stay. Fifty thousand pounds to Madge Norbury, of this address. Send all documents to me here for signature.—KEITH."

Once more, she pondered if these three gifts were inconsistent with her aim. She denied it. Throngs would benefit whom the Trust had never harmed; among them, why not four struggling lives whose worth she knew? Truly their wants could have been relieved by humbler grants, but that point she was not the woman to discern. When Betty gave, she gave "enough."

Over the common, unregarded, she went with her answer, that was to thrill the world.

"Six pounds, fifteen," said the clerk in charge.

"So much?" she exclaimed. "I don't know if I have it here."

"There are a hundred and thirty-five words."

"Oh, well,"—she emptied the purse,—"it has to go! Will you send it for me at once, please?"

A minute she lingered, listening. She stood gathering her scanty change, as the apparatus ticked away her millions to the Poor: no girl, swept headlong by an impulse—a woman completing a resolve. Her steadfast eyes were solemn as she listened. Her mind beheld the

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ruin of the dead man's earthly hopes; yet her spirit viewed some shadow lifted from his soul. If, from the Infinite, her act were seen, millions looked lesser there—and pity, most. From the Great Beyond, he would not condemn.

Peace flooded her heart as she turned away. Many a still evening there had been, the same, but none like it unto her. The flush of the sky, the tenderness of the hour, all Nature breathed a promise. Care was behind—ahead, the sweet fulfilment of her plan. Her step was buoyant on the grass. Clearer than the village lights that sprang into the gloaming, she saw the light of Home. Nearer than the poverty that she re-entered, she found the wealth of joy. The lamp-lit room was mean, but her friend was in it; the hill had been steep, but its height was climbed.

From the People, her husband, and her boy—God, and herself!

Back to the lesson.

"Tack it together. . . . You've got the shoulder seam crooked. . . . That's it. That's right. Now—stitch!"

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CHAPTER XXIII

It occurred to her afterwards that, instead of "on my behalf" in the cablegram, she might have said, "for me," and so saved a shilling. Probably she might have saved more shillings than one. She had just resigned millions cheerfully, but she could not help thinking of that six pounds, fifteen.

It annoyed her therefore to receive a reply which put her to further expense:

"Most earnestly counsel consideration. The course you contemplate is open to you always. No need for haste. Confer with me before you act. If you cannot come here, I will go to you."

She condensed her rejoinder with care, and it ran:

"You have received definite instructions. Please cable immediately whether you will fulfil them."

To this a final warning:

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"Your wishes shall be obeyed. Legal formalities, however, cannot be completed before two months. After that, revocation impossible."

She did not know whether it was true that legal formalities would take so long, or whether time for consideration was being discreetly imposed upon her; but she resigned herself to the delay, and the weeks stole by.

A child from the village sauntered no more into the drowsy garden with tidings from a distant land. The woman who was to be world-famous during a nine days' wonder trod the roads of Rusthall unremarked, and continued her daily parsimonies. The woman who was to be astounded by news that would metamorphose her life, continued to be nurse, author, dressmaker, and the playmate of her child. The colours of the common changed and the colours of the garden, and, one by one, Ducksums' petticoats were lengthened. But in the routine of the women nothing changed. Their days were as before.

And meanwhile, as Betty had supposed, Keith believed her to be still in New York. He imagined her sustained by Mrs. Waldehast, condoled with by Society, urged by confidants more strongly than ever to sue for her freedom. He had been prepared for her to do that earlier, and

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given thanks for the silence; the silence hinted that some feeling for him remained. As well as if he had been present, he knew the advice that was urged upon her—yet she struggled against it, she would not agree to divorce him!

Time had softened his memory of their dissensions; perhaps the joy of accomplishing good work had softened it even more. It was no longer for his bride alone that he sorrowed—he longed also for his wife. He reproached himself for harshness, for lack of patience; sometimes it seemed to him that he had been merciless. If his means had improved, he would have written to her; a score of impulses had seized him to write, even as it was. But, when the pen was in his hand, what could be said? She had drooped under the poverty, and he was still as poor. Only if his picture fulfilled his expectations would there be anything to say. If "The Harbour of Souls" succeeded, he would implore her to return!

Not to effect a reunion had he begun the picture—the man was an artist, and he painted because he must—but he had thought of her homecoming when he set his palette in the early morning, and he had thought of her homecoming when he washed his brushes at the close of day. And while the picture grew—while every mail might bring the news he dreaded, and every mail still

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withheld it—Keith had trembled for the result of that contention in New York, the contention in which unknown people fought against his dearest hope.

Then the hope had been slain by other means; he had read of her brother's death, and of her father's—and he fancied his wife reigning in the great house that she had quitted, mistress of the colossal fortune that she meant to sign away. And, in spite of this, the canvas had claimed him still. The picture of the homecoming had faded, but the picture on the easel had progressed. He had painted through every hour of light, painted, and painted out, and painted again. And now the work of ten months was finished, and the victory that he had prayed for all his life had come. "The Harbour of Souls" had been bought by the Chantrey Bequest—on Keith had been bestowed the highest recognition that can be granted to any painter in England. And, being an artist, he exulted; and, being a man, he mourned. From the summit of success he raised his arms to wife and child, to make the joy complete.

Redirected from Telemachus Mansions, a letter was delivered at the studio. And the first words startled him, and he turned to the signature—and the signature was strange, and he read the first words again:

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'DEAR SIR,—Since I came back with Mrs. Keith from America in April, Mother has been ailing, and I have been keeping house for Father in Felixstowe. But now I am going to take a place again, and I should be much obliged if Mrs. Keith would kindly send the character she promised. The lady that I am going to has written to Rusthall, but her letter was returned from 3 Fuchsia Terrace, marked 'Gone Away,' so I am taking the liberty of writing to you, hoping you will send this on to Mrs. Keith if she is not at home. Hoping Baby is well.—

"Yours respectfully,

"HARRIET FRY."

The nurse! And Betty had "come back in April!" His mind ran riot. What could it mean except that——

But why strive to conjecture what it meant when he might be able to ask her, face to face? Rusthall. Perhaps she was at Rusthall now? At least he should contrive to find her! He crushed the letter in his pocket, and sped down the flights of steps.

Among the decayed four-wheelers on the hopeless Foundling rank, a mouldering hansom stood.

"Charing Cross—as quick as you can go!" he cried. And its quickest was a crawl to his im-

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patience, and he beat the stuffy cushion with his fist.

And while he leant over the doors of the doddering cab, a placard struck his senses and the wonder of the hour was hurled.

"Lynch's Daughter Gives Up Her Fortune!"

As he jumped, the board was passed.

"Forty Millions To The Poor!" The proclamation fluttered at a street corner, strident voices yelled it to the crowd.

"Stop!" he called; and a grimy hand shoved evening papers to his clutch.

"This is a bit of all right, guv'nor?" exclaimed the vagrant. "Gord bless the lady!"

"God bless the lady!" echoed her husband. "There's a sovereign—keep the change."

"Strike me pink, the world's gone barmy!" gasped the man, and the cab jerked on.

But the lines were few; just the sensational fact was cabled: "Lynch's Daughter Gives Up Her Fortune!" That was all. But that was everywhere. Contents bills blazoned it, newsboys bellowed it, London resounded with her deed. At the station he seized more papers, in the hope of learning where she was, and scanned them while he waited for his train. No hint!

In the compartment, all the men were talking of her. The journey among strangers chatter-

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ing her name seemed eternal. If it failed? He hungered to discover her. He wanted to kneel at her feet, to bow his head on her knees. He famined to reach her. And she might not be in England, after all! Perhaps while his nerves strained for Rusthall, she was looking from a window in New York?

Tunbridge Wells at last. In the twilight, he was rattled over the road on which they used to stroll together to the Pantiles, past the walls of the hotel where they had stayed. Fuchsia Terrace was unfamiliar; when the stoppage of the fly announced it, his throat grew tight that she had known its ignominy.

A slattern advanced, with a trail of unhealthy children.

"Is Mrs. Keith here?"

"Mrs. Keith?" She tossed a frowzy head. "Oh no!"

"She did lodge here, didn't she?"

"Mrs. Keith left months ago."

"Do you happen to know where she went? I'm very anxious to find her. It's most important that I should see her at once."

"I couldn't say, I'm sure."

"Can you tell me if she is still in Rusthall?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," repeated the woman.

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He brought out some shillings and rejoiced the unhealthy children, none of whom said "Thank you."

The woman hesitated.

"I couldn't say for rights where she's staying, but I've seen her about, once or twice, since she left me."

"Lately?"

"I suppose the last time I see her might ha' been a fortnight ago."

"Thank you very much."

He rushed back to the fly, and told the man to drive to the post office. At the post office, he astonished the girl at the desk by taking off his hat to her. Could she favour him with the address of a lady in the neighbourhood named Mrs. Keith?

"Mrs. Richard Keith?"

"Mrs. Richard Keith," he stammered.

"She's living at Hyder's—over there, the house by the poplars," said the girl graciously, and was sorry that the gentleman went out in such a hurry.

By the poplars, a high gate; through the gate, a darksome path. Six strides, and he had reached the door.

"Mrs. Keith?"

"Who shall I say, sir?"

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"'Her husband,' please," he answered. And a girl beyond cried, "Mrs. Keith's in the drawing-room, mother!" He was left standing in the porch.

Into the light of the little hall a lady hastened, with friendly, smiling eyes.

"Your wife just went upstairs, Mr. Keith," she said; "I'll show you the way."

"I shall be grateful."

But, instead of inviting him to enter, the lady led him round the house to a kitchen garden. And at a stair-head was an open window, shining yellow on the night.

"Your wife's up there," she murmured, and was gone.

He mustn't frighten her! The thought thrust him back in time.

"Betty!" he whispered, trembling.

Only the fruit boughs rustled in the breeze.

"Betty!" he called. And a figure came between the lamp-glow and the dusk.

"Betty!"

It was Her wondering face that bent in the darkness! It was Her wondering voice that broke with his name!

She flung out her hands to him.

And he stumbled up the staircase and caught her in his arms.

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And afterwards he didn't know what *he* had said, or what *she* had said in the first few moments, but, "If you go on being so penitent, I shall begin to think you must have treated me very badly," she was smiling. And love and girlhood were in her smile, and her dimple was sunning in her cheek. And would any other woman, with big tears splashing, have laughed, "I always did stroke your hair the wrong way, didn't I? You've got to put up with it?"

Then she was exclaiming, "I've got so much to tell you, but I can't get a word in sideways! How did you find me?"

And when he began to say how he had found her, memories sprang, interrupting—and called other memories—and he had to begin again:

"Nurse——"

"Dickie!"—she beat feeble hands on him—"why do you keep saying 'nurse'—what has nurse got to do with it?"

"She wrote to me—she wants a character, and doesn't know where you are. But she said you had gone to Rusthall."

"Oh! Now you're rewarded for not sending her away when you wanted to—look how nice it is for you! Yes? Well? Go on, tell me all! Oh, if you were a woman you'd have told me everything in ten seconds—everything that has

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happened to you—only you couldn't have told me anything that was half so lovely to hear! Go on, Dickie; never mind what you say—just hold me tight and talk!"

"I got her letter this afternoon, and I tumbled into a cab; and on the way to Charing Cross I saw the news, what you've done——"

"You know?"

"Know? All London's shouting it. And I stopped the cab to get a paper, and the man said, 'God bless the lady,' and *I* said, 'God bless the lady,' and—and—— it *is* 'God bless the lady'! Betty, you're an Angel! You're the greatest woman on earth."

"O—oh," she cooed. "And then, and then, and then? Well?"

"Well, then I went to Fuchsia Terrace.—My heart, what a place for you! how could you go there, kiddy?—And she told me she had seen you since you left; and I went to the post office, and they gave me your address, and—— Betty, has it been very awful for you? You've been living on that hundred a year? Why didn't you tell me what you were doing?"

"My!" she mocked him with dismay; "that reminds me—you've come much too soon; you're all 'out of the picture'; I meant to be here for a year before you knew what I was doing! I ought

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to send you away again. I'm learning to be a proper wife to you. Dardy said I couldn't, but I *am*. How do you suppose that Baby's—— Well!" Her radiant face grimaced at him. "You're a fine father, you haven't asked about your son yet!"

"How's our son, my wife?"

"How is he? He is unique. He's asleep in there. Come and look!"

They crept to the cot, and stood silent. After a minute she whispered, "He can walk! He topples sometimes, but no other baby ever toppled so well." Next, "Come back, or we shall wake him! . . . I've got something to tell you. How do you suppose his clothes have been made big enough? I did them myself, to save buying new ones. A woman downstairs showed me how —I'm just great at altering clothes to-day." She popped a pink finger to his lips: "I don't know if the needle has roughened my finger for you—feel!"

And then Miss Hyder appeared with a potato pie; and Betty whispered to him, "If I had known I'd have company to supper, I'd have saved some rice pudding."

He watched her cut the loaf. She cut it with amazing skill—and chid him for "daintiness" be-

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cause he was so sick with love that he couldn't eat. But she was no better herself.

On the path where he had called to her the moon shone now, and from their chairs the kitchen garden was enchanted. She wanted to hear how it was that he hadn't "come in at the door, like anybody else," and laughter rippled when he told her of his guide. "There was the touch of the dramatist about that—she writes plays, you know! What are you painting now, Dickie? How's the work?"

"Sweetheart," he answered, "take some potato pie—it's your last chance!"

Her chair fell back, she was beside him in a flash, her hands on his shoulders: "What have you done?"

"I've finished 'The Harbour of Souls.'"

For an instant, though her lips smiled, her gaze was wistful—she hadn't been there to see!

"Good?" she faltered.

"Sold for a thousand guineas!"

"A thousand guineas? Not Vivard?"

"The Chantrey Bequest!"

"Dick!" No shade on her rapture now—she clung to him, breathless, eager, triumphant. It was the moment of his life, and hers. "The 'Chantrey Bequest' means fame?"

"It means the biggest thing that could possibly

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have happened to us. They've invited me to exhibit it at the Academy next year. The public 'll say it's magnificent, incomprehensible, or rotten; but they'll flock to see it, and they'll talk about it, because the Chantrey Bequest has bought it. From the Academy it'll go to the permanent collection at the Tate Gallery."

"Permanent? When Baby grows up?"

"Always—it's bought for England, it's the property of the nation." Tears sprang to his eyes. "My God, I'm proud of the honour! And yet, when I think of yours, this thing that *I* have done seems too petty to talk about. But it isn't the honour only, loveliest, it means the end of the struggle, it means I'm 'made.' After this, my prices are whatever I choose to ask. I can give you a pretty home, and peace of mind. I can take you away from here to-morrow morning—to London, Paris, Rome, wherever you'd like to go. If I painted more quickly, we could have six or seven thousand a year now; even doing my best work, we can be sure of comfort. You've only to say what you want to make you quite happy—only tell me what I'm to do!"

"You are to do—your best work," she told him. "That's what we're going to live for, Dickie, to do our best! Oh, I am glad for you, glad, glad! Yes, you shall take me early to-morrow, and the

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first thing I'm to see is your picture. Talk to me about it. When did you begin it—how long ago?"

"I began it soon after you went. And I've been at work on it ever since."

"How did you manage, Dick—you've been hard up?"

"About two bob a day—I did a sketch now and then to keep me going, and I didn't do many—I couldn't spare the time. And I thought of you while I was painting—I meant to beg you to come home if I made a hit. And all the time, I was afraid of the mail!"

"The mail?"

"Afraid they'd persuade you to get rid of me before the thing was done."

"Oh, my dear," she moaned, clinging to him, "my dear!"

"All the time I thought of you, Betty, I wanted you so much, my love! If I had guessed! Tell me, what do you do here—you've no nurse at all?"

"I've Queenie."

"Who's Queenie?"

"She's a child who comes to wheel Baby's carriage for me. She's about fourteen, but it doesn't seem to be too heavy for her, and she's very elated by the eighteenpence a week. We go out every

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morning and afternoon if it's fine. Sometimes we go to the Happy Valley."

"My poor little girl!"

"No, you aren't to say that! it hasn't been so rough as you think. I've got quite used to it. There's always something to do, to keep me from being dull, and it doesn't seem a rush any more, as it did at the start. When I come back, there's dinner, and then Baby goes to sleep. And then we play, and go for another walk—I think I like our afternoon walks best. I've found such pretty bits; I'd like to show you! Then there's tea. And I give him his bath. And after supper——"

The landlady's daughter knocked again, with a basket of clean washing.

"Oh, Mrs. Keith, Mrs. Tobitt says would you very kindly oblige her with the money to-night, instead of on Monday?"

"What, this week too?" said Betty gaily. "Oh, that husband of hers! Will you wait while I count them, then, Miss Hyder? You might clear away while I'm doing it, please."

Wondering, he saw her lift the things on to the sofa, and arrange them in neat little stacks, and compare them with the list. As naturally as if she had been doing it all her life, she checked the bill, and produced two and ninepence, and pencilled in the book that a pair of Baby's socks

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was missing. Amazement possessed him as he watched her.

"And after supper," she went on, as if nothing had happened, when they were alone, "I've got his frocks to mend. I'm terribly vain of mending frocks! And there's my friend downstairs—we sit on those steps and talk every evening, before we go to bed. It's so beautifully still; there isn't a sound, except a church-clock that chimes protectively. I—I don't know——" She looked round, hesitating. "Don't imagine I won't enjoy a good time on the Continent, but I'm not sure I'm so keen on saying good-bye to all this in quite such a hurry. I'd like to go and feast on your picture before breakfast to-morrow, but don't you think we might come back for two or three days?"

"You want to?" he asked, marvelling.

"If you won't think it silly? It's difficult to put into words, but—— You see, this has been my home for a long while, and I've felt so much here!" Her voice trembled. "I'd like time to—to look at it, and look back at it, before I go. 'Tisn't that I don't want to go to you, my love; it's *because* I love you, because I've tried so hard to be better for you here, that the place means so much to me."

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"Kiddy!" he said chokily. Her palm lay upturned in her lap, and his hand closed on it.

"You don't mind?"

"It's what I'd choose! *I'd* like to go with you for the walks—'Queenie' shall take us all. I'd like to watch you while you sew the things, I'd like to live just the life that *you've* been living, my dearest dear. Never mind how long—even if it's only a few days, it'll always make the time we've been apart seem shorter to me afterwards."

"That's what I thought," she murmured—"we shall have been together here. And we couldn't be more than happy *anywhere!*"

So they saw "happiness"—to be together.

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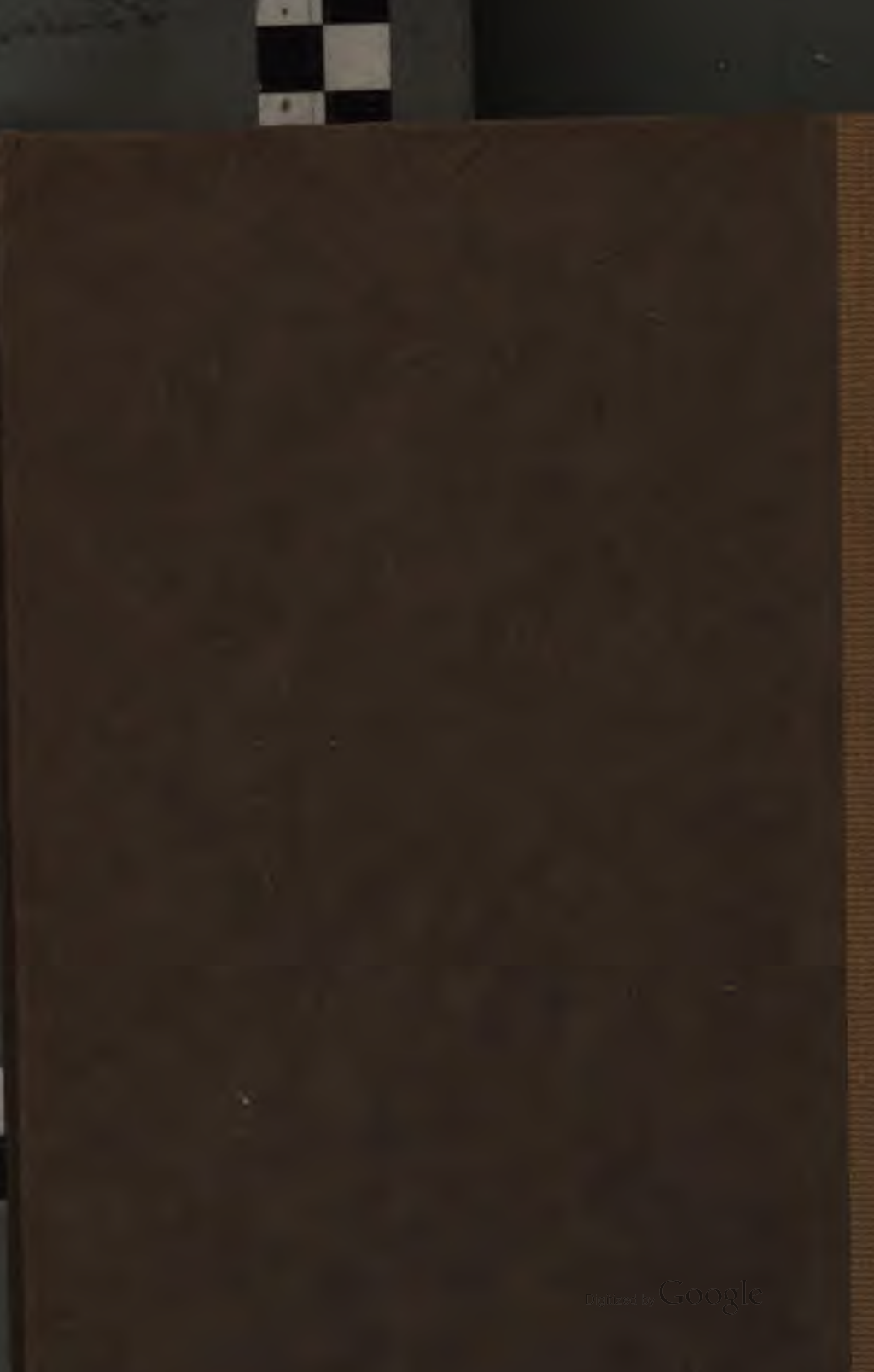
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